



TENNYSON

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LANCELOT AND ELAINE

WITH  
INTRODUCTIONS AND NOTES

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# GENERAL INTRODUCTION.

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Biography. I. Tennyson the man: 1. His sense of Law shown in his conceptions of (a) Nature; (b) Freedom; (c) Love; (d) Scenery. 2. His nobility of thought, and his religion. 3. His simplicity of emotion. II. Tennyson the Poet: 1. As Representative of his Age. 2. As Artist: (a) His observation; (b) His scholarship; (c) His expressiveness; (d) His similes; (e) His avoidance of the commonplace; (f) His repetition and assonance; (g) His harmony of rhythm; (h) His melody of diction. His dramatic works. Conclusion.

ALFRED, LORD TENNYSON, was born on August 6th, Biography. 1809, at Somersby, a village in Lincolnshire, of which his father was rector. The wolds surrounding his home, the fen some miles away, with its "level waste" and "trenched waters," and the sea on the Lincolnshire coast, with "league-long rollers" and "table-shore," are pictured again and again in his poems.

When he was seven years old he was sent to the Louth Grammar School, and returning home after a few years there, was educated with his elder brother Charles by his father. Charles and Alfred Tennyson, while yet youths, published in 1827 a small volume of poetry entitled *Poems by Two Brothers*. In 1828 the two brothers entered Trinity College, Cambridge, where Alfred gained the University Chancellor's gold

medal for a poem on *Timbuctoo*, and where he formed an intimate friendship with Arthur Henry Hallam (son of the historian), whose memory he has immortalised in *In Memoriam*. Among his other Cambridge friends may be mentioned R. C. Trench (afterwards Archbishop of Dublin), Monckton Milnes (afterwards Lord Houghton), J. M. Kemble (the Anglo-Saxon scholar), Merivale (the historian, afterwards Dean of Ely), James Spedding, and W. H. Brookfield. In 1830 Tennyson published his *Poems, chiefly Lyrical*, among which are to be found some sixty pieces that are preserved in the present issues of his works. In 1832 *Poems by Alfred Tennyson* appeared, and then, after an interval of ten years, two more volumes, also with the title *Poems*. His reputation as a poet was now established, though his greatest works were yet to come. Chief among these are *The Princess* (1847), *In Memoriam* (1850), *Maud* (1855), *Idylls of the King* (1859-1885), and *Enoch Arden* (1864). In 1875 Tennyson published his first drama, *Queen Mary*, followed by *Harold* (1877), *The Cup* (acted in 1881), *The Promise of May* (1882), *The Falcon* and *Becket* (1884), and *The Foresters* (1892). On the death of Wordsworth in 1850, Tennyson succeeded him as Poet Laureate. In 1874 he was gazetted Baron of Aldworth and Farringford, his two seats in Sussex and in the Isle of Wight. He died on October 6th, 1892, and was buried in Westminster Abbey, near the grave of Browning.

I. Tennyson  
the man :

I. Of all modern English poets Tennyson has most readers; and the chief elements of the powerful charm which he exercises over the hearts and minds of all English-speaking peoples will be evident on even a brief

survey of the character of his mind as revealed in his works, and of the matter and the form of his verse. At the basis of all Tennyson's teaching, indeed of all his work, is Tennyson *the man*. The mould of a poet's mind is the mould in which his thoughts and even his modes of expression must run, and the works of a poet cannot be fully understood unless we understand the poet himself.

1. Conspicuous among the main currents of thought and feeling that flow through the body of his writings is his perception of the movement of Law throughout the worlds of sense and of spirit: he recognises therein a settled scheme of great purposes underlying a universal order and gradually developing to completion.

(a) Illustrations of this recognition of pervading Law may be found in his conception of Nature, and in his treatment of human action and of natural scenery. Nature, which to Shelley was a spirit of Love, and to Wordsworth a living and speaking presence of Thought, is to Tennyson a process of Law including both. Even in the midst of his mourning over the seeming waste involved in the early death of his friend, he can write in *In Memoriam*

I curse not nature, no, nor death;  
For nothing is that errs from law.

In all the workings of Nature he traces the evolution of the great designs of God:

That God, which ever lives and loves,  
One God, one law, one element,  
And one far-off divine event  
To which the whole creation moves.

In *The Higher Pantheism*, a similar thought is found :

God is law, say the wise ; O soul, and let us rejoice,  
For if He thunder by law, the thunder is yet His voice.

- (b) Freedom ;    (b) Allied to this faith that the universe is "roll'd round by one fixt law" is the poet's sympathy with disciplined order in the various spheres of human action. In his teaching on social and political questions, his ideal is a majestic order, a gradual and regular development, without rest indeed, but, above all, without haste. His ideal Freedom is "sober-suited" ; it is such a Freedom as has been evolved by the gradual growth of English institutions, a Freedom which

slowly broadens down  
From precedent to precedent.

He has small faith in sudden outbursts of revolutionary fervour ; he thinks that the "red fool fury of the Seine" (alluding to the excesses of the French revolutionaries), the "flashing heats" of the "frantic city," retard man's progress towards real liberty : they "but fire to blast the hopes of men." If liberty is to be a solid and lasting possession, it must be gained by patient years of working and waiting, not by "expecting all things in an hour" ; for with him "raw Haste" is but "half-sister to Delay." So also Tennyson's love for his own country is regulated and philosophic : he has given us a few patriotic martial lyrics that stir the living blood "like a trumpet call," as *The Charge of the Light Brigade* and *The Revenge*, but in the main his patriotism is founded on admiration for the great "storied past" of England. Though in youth he triumphs in "the Vision of the world and all the wonder that would be,"

yet neither in youth nor in age is he himself without some distrust of the new democratic forces which may end in "working their own doom":—

Step by step we gain'd a freedom known to Europe, known  
to all,

Step by step we rose to greatness—thro' the tonguesters we  
may fall.

(c) Again, in his conception of the passion of Love, (c) Love; and in his portraiture of Womanhood, the same spirit of reverence and self-control animates Tennyson's verse. Love, in Tennyson, is a pure unselfish passion. Even the guilty love of Lancelot and Guinevere is described from a spiritual standpoint, in its evil effects rather than in any sensuous detail. His highest ideal of love is found in the pure passion of wedded life: true love can exist only under the sanction of Duty and of Reverence for womanhood and one's higher self; and such love is the source of man's loftiest ideas, and the inspiration of his noblest deeds. Examples of this treatment may be seen in *The Miller's Daughter*, *Enoch Arden*, *The Gardener's Daughter*, and *Guinevere*, and it underlies the moral lessons inculcated in *The Princess*.

(d) Lastly, Tennyson's appreciation of Order is illus- (d) Scenery. trated in his treatment of natural scenery. It is true that he sometimes gives us scenes of savage grandeur, as in

the monstrous ledges slope and spill

Their thousand wreaths of dangling water-smoke,

but he oftener describes still English landscapes, the "haunts of ancient peace," with "plaited alleys" and "terrace lawn," "long, gray fields," "tracts of pasture sunny-warm," and all the ordered quiet of rural life.

(2) His nobility of thought, and his religion.

2. A second great element of Tennyson's character is its noble tone. This is present in every poem he has ever written. His verse is informed with the very spirit of Honour, of Duty, and of Reverence for all that is pure and true. This is the spirit that animates the famous passage in *Enone*:

Self-reverence, self-knowledge, self-control,  
These three alone lead life to sovereign power.  
Yet not for power (power of herself  
Would come uncalled for), but to live by law,  
Acting the law we live by without fear;  
And, because right is right, to follow right  
Were wisdom in the scorn of consequence.

It is illustrated on its negative side in *The Palace of Art*; it breathes through his noble *Ode on the Death of the Duke of Wellington*, and it pervades and inspires his picture of King Arthur in the *Idylls of the King*.

Tennyson's religious faith is sufficiently indicated in his writings. At the root of his poetry (as Mr. Stopford Brooke has remarked) lie "the ever-working immanence of God in man, the brotherhood of the human race, and its evolution into perfect love and righteousness; the continuance of each man's personal consciousness in the life to be; the vitality of the present—man alive and Nature alive, and alive with the life of God."

(3) His simplicity of emotion.

3. Another main characteristic of Tennyson is simplicity. The emotions that he appeals to are generally easy to understand and common to all. He avoids the subtle analysis of character, and the painting of complex motives or of the wild excess of passion. The moral laws which he so strongly upholds are those primary sanctions upon which average English society is founded.

A certain Puritan simplicity and a scholarly restraint pervade the mass of his work.

It is on these foundations of Order, Nobility, and Simplicity that Tennyson's character is built.

II. Turning now to the matter or substance of his poems, we note, first, that the two chief factors of Tennyson's popularity are that he is a representative English poet, and that he is a consummate Artist.

II. Tennyson  
the Poet:

1. In the great spheres of human thought—in religion, in morals, in social life—his poems reflect the complex tendencies of his age and his surroundings. Not, it may be, the most advanced ideas, not the latest speculation, not the transient contentions of the hour; but the broad results of culture and experience upon the poet's English contemporaries. The ground of Tennyson's claim to be considered a representative of his age is seen in the lines of thought pursued in some of those more important poems which deal with the great problems and paramount interests of his times. The poems cover a period of fifty years, and must be considered in the order of their publication. In *Locksley Hall*, published in 1842, the speaker, after giving vent to his own tale of passion and regret, becomes the mouthpiece of the young hopes and aspirations of the Liberalism of the early Victorian era, while in *Locksley Hall Sixty Years After*, the doubts and distrust felt by the Conservatism of our own times find dramatic utterance. *The Princess* deals with a question of lasting interest to society, and one which has of late years risen into more conspicuous importance, the changing position and proper sphere of Woman. In *The Palace of Art* the poet describes and

(1) As Representative of  
his Age;



condemns a spirit of æstheticism whose sole religion is the worship of Beauty and Knowledge for their own sakes, and which ignores human responsibility and obligations to one's fellow-men: while in *St. Simeon Stylites*, the poet equally condemns the evils of a self-centred religious asceticism which despises the active duties of daily life. *The Vision of Sin* is a picture of the perversion of nature and of the final despair which attend the pursuit of sensual pleasure. *The Two Voices* illustrates the introspective self-analysis with which the age discusses the fundamental problem of existence, finding all solutions vain except those dictated by the simplest voices of the conscience and the heart. The poet's great work, *In Memoriam*, is the history of a tender human soul confronted with the stern, relentless order of the Universe and the seeming waste and cruelty of Death. The poem traces the progress of sorrow from the Valley of Death, over-shadowed by the darkness of unspeakable loss, through the regions of philosophic doubt and meditation to the serene heights of resignation and hope, where Faith and Love can triumph over Death in the confident hope of a life beyond, and over Doubt by the realization

That all, as in some piece of art,  
Is toil coöperant to an end.

*Maud* is dated at the conclusion of that long period of peace which ended at the Crimean War, when the commercial prosperity of England had reached a height unknown before, and when "Britain's sole god" was the millionaire. The poem gives a dramatic ren-

dering of the revolt of a cultured mind against the hypocrisy and corruptions of a society degraded by the worship of Mammon, though the hero inherits a vein of insanity and speaks too bitterly. The teaching of Tennyson's longest, and in many respects greatest poem—the spreading mischief of a moral taint—is discussed at length in the Introduction to *The Coming of Arthur and the Passing of Arthur*.<sup>1</sup> Here too Tennyson expresses one of the deepest convictions of his time.

2. But if Tennyson's popularity is based upon a (2) *As Artist*, correspondence between his own reverence for Law and the deepest foundations of English character, it is based no less upon his delicate power as an Artist. Among the elements of this power may be mentioned (a) a minute observation of Nature, which furnishes him with a store of poetic description and imagery; (b) a scholarly appreciation of all that is most picturesque in the literature of the past; (c) an exquisite precision in the use of words and phrases; (d) the picturesqueness and the aptness of his similes; (e) an avoidance of the commonplace; (f) his use of repetition and of assonance; (g) the expressive harmonies of his rhythm, and (h) the subtle melody of his diction.

(a) For minute observation and vivid painting of the details of natural scenery Tennyson is without a rival. (a) *His observation*; We feel that he has seen all that he describes. This may be illustrated by a few examples of his tree-studies:

hair

In gloss and hue the chestnut, when the shell  
Divides three-fold to show the fruit within

(*The Brook*)

<sup>1</sup>Macmillan and Co.

those eyes  
 Darker than darkest pansies, and that hair  
 More black than ashbuds in the front of March  
*(The Gardener's Daughter)*

With blasts that blow the poplar white  
*(In Memoriam)*

A million emeralds break from the ruby-budded lime  
*(Maud)*

a stump of oak half-dead,  
 From roots like some black coil of carven snakes,  
 Clutch'd at the crag *(The Last Tournament).*

We may also notice the exactness of the epithets in  
 "perky larches," "dry-tongu'd laurels," "high-elbow'd  
 grigs," "pillar'd dusk of sounding sycamores," "labur-  
 numbs, dropping-wells of fire."

Equally exact are his descriptions of scientific pheno-  
 mena :

Before the little ducts began  
 To feed thy bones with lime, and ran  
 Their course till thou wert also man  
*(The Two Voices)*

Still, as while Saturn whirls, his steadfast shade  
 Sleeps on his luminous ring  
*(The Palace of Art).*

This accurate realization of natural or scientific facts  
 is often of service in furnishing apt illustrations of  
 moral truths or of emotions of the mind :

Break, thou deep vase of chilling tears  
 That grief has shaken into frost  
*(In Memoriam)*

Their thousand wreaths of dangling water-smoke  
 That like a broken purpose waste in air  
*(The Princess)*

Prayer, from a living source within the will,  
 And beating up through all the bitter world,  
 Like fountains of sweet water in the sea

(*Enoch Arden*).

(b) Allusions to the Classics of more than one land may be found in Tennyson. Lines and expressions would seem sometimes to be suggested by the Greek or Latin poets, and in these the translation is generally so happy a rendering of the original as to give an added grace to what was already beautiful. Illustrations of this characteristic will be found among the Notes at the end of this volume. There is occasionally a reconditeness about these allusions which may puzzle the general reader. For example, in the lines

And over those ethereal eyes  
 The bar of Michael Angelo

(*In Memoriam*)

where the reference is to the projection of the frontal bone above the eye-brows noticeable in the portraits of Michael Angelo and of Arthur Hallam, a peculiarity of shape said to indicate strength of character and mental power. Similarly in

Proxy-wedded with a bootless calf

(*The Princess*)

we find an allusion to an old ceremony of marriage by proxy, where an ambassador or agent representing the absent bridegroom, after taking off his long riding-boot, placed his leg in the bridal bed.

(c) We may next note Tennyson's unequalled power of finding single words to give at a flash, as it were,

(c) His expressiveness;

an exact picture. What he has written of Virgil's art is equally true of his own, which offers us

All the charm of all the Muses  
often flowering in a lonely word.

This power of fitting the word to the thought may be seen in the following examples: "*creamy* spray"; "*lily* maid"; "the ripple *washing* in the reeds" and "the wild water *lapping* on the crag"; "the dying ebb that faintly *lipp'd* the flat red granite"; "as the fiery Sirius *bickers* into red and emerald"; "women *blowz'd* with health and wind and rain."

(d) His  
similes;

(d) Mr. G. C. Macaulay (Introduction to *Gareth and Lynette*) has remarked upon the picturesqueness, the elaborate aptness, and the individual and personal character of Tennyson's similes. Of their picturesque aptness two examples will be sufficient here:

The great brand  
Made lightnings in the splendour of the moon,  
And flashing round and round, and whirl'd in an arch,  
Shot like a streamer of the northern morn,  
Seen where the moving isles of winter shock  
By night, with noises of the northern sea  
(*Morte d'Arthur*)

Dust are our frames; and, gilded dust, our pride  
Looks only for a moment whole and sound;  
Like that long-buried body of the king,  
Found lying with his urns and ornaments,  
Which at a touch of light, an air of heaven,  
Slipt into ashes, and was found no more  
(*Aylmer's Field*).

As regards their individual and personal character, Tennyson's similes in many cases "do not so much

appeal to common experience, as bring before us some special thing or some peculiar aspect of nature, which the poet has vividly present to his own mind, while to the reader perhaps the picture suggested may be quite unfamiliar." As examples we may take the following :

So now that shadow of mischance appear'd  
No graver than as when some little cloud  
Cuts off the fiery highway of the sun,  
And isles a light in the offing.

(*Enoch Arden*).

So, in *Geraint and Enid*, when the bandit falls transfixed by Geraint's lance, Tennyson writes :

As he that tells the tale  
Saw once a great piece of a promontory,  
That had a sapling growing on it, slide  
From the long shore-cliff's windy walls to the beach,  
And there lie still, and yet the sapling grew.

A remarkable instance of this individuality occurs in *Gareth and Lynette* :

Gareth lookt and read—  
In letters like to those the vexillary  
Hath left crag-carven o'er the streaming Gelt :—

the Gelt being a small stream in Cumberland, not named in any of the ordinary gazetteers or atlases ; and the reference is to an inscription on a lime-stone rock near this stream, carved by the Second Legion of Augustus, stationed there in A.D. 207.

(e) Possessing such a faculty of appropriate expression, the poet naturally avoids the commonplace : he not only rigidly excludes all otiose epithets and stop-gap phrases, but often, where other writers would use

(e) His avoidance of the commonplace;

some familiar, well-worn word, he selects one less known but equally true and expressive. He has a distinct fondness for good old Saxon words and expressions, and has helped to rescue many of these from undeserved oblivion. Thus, for the "skinflint" of common parlance he substitutes (in *Walking to the Mail*) the "flayflint" of Ray's *Proverbs*; in place of "blindman's buff" is found the older "hoodman blind" (*In Memoriam*); for "village and cowshed" he writes "thorpe and byre" (*The Victim*), while in *The Brook* the French "cricket" appears as the Saxon "grig." Other examples might be quoted, e.g., *lurdane*, *rathe*, *plash*, *brewis*, *thrall'd*, *boles*, *quitch*, *reckling*, *roky*, *yaffingale*. Occasionally he prefers a word of his own coinage, as *tonguester*, *selfless*. This tendency to avoid the commonplace is noticeable not only in separate words, but in the rendering of ideas, a poetic dress being given to prosaic details by a kind of stately circumlocution: thus in *The Princess* the hero's northern birthplace is indicated by his telling us that "on my cradle shone the Northern star"; and, in the same poem, the blue smoke rising from household chimneys is described by "azure pillars of the hearth"—an expression which Mr. P. M. Wallace, in his edition of *The Princess*, aptly calls "almost reverent"; icebergs are "moving isles of winter"; while to picture the hour before the planet Venus had sunk into the sea, the poet writes:

Before the crimson-circled star  
Had fall'n into her father's grave.

(f) His repetition and assonance;

(f) One of the leading characteristics of Tennyson's style is the repetition of a word (often in a modified

form) in the same or sometimes in a slightly different sense. We have, for instance :

Whereat the novice crying, with clasp'd hands,  
Shame on her own *garrulity garrulously*  
(*Guinevere*)

and in the same poem,

The *maiden* passion for a *maid* ;  
to which we may add :

For ever *climbing* up the *climbing* wave  
(*The Lotos-Eaters*)

*Mouldering* with the dull earth's *mouldering* sod  
(*The Palace of Art*).

Assonance—the repetition not of a word but of a sound—is also a favourite device with Tennyson for giving a kind of epigrammatic force to a statement, as in

Even to *tipmost* lance and *topmost* helm  
(*The Last Tournament*)

Thy Paynim bard  
Had such a *mastery* of his *mystery*  
That he could harp his wife up out of hell  
(*Ib.*)

Then with that *friendly-fiendly* smile of his  
(*Harold*).

(g) Lastly, if we examine the metrical characteristics of Tennyson's poetry, we observe that the sense of <sup>(g) His har-</sup> majesty of <sup>mony of</sup> rhythm ; majestic order and gradual development pervading the substance of his poems is not more conspicuous than is the sense of music which governs the style of his versification. While less powerful than Milton's at its best, Tennyson's blank verse always remains at a high level of excellence, and its simple grandeur of style and expression is peculiarly his own. It is in his



lyrical poems, however, that his mastery of metre and rhythm best shows itself. He knows all the secrets of harmonious measures and melodious diction; he has re-cast and polished his earlier poems with such minute and scrupulous care that he has at length attained a metrical form more perfect than has been reached by any other poet. Several illustrations of the delicacy of his sense of metre are pointed out in the Notes. A few more examples may be here quoted to show how frequently in his verse the sound echoes the sense. This is seen in his Representative Rhythms. Thus:

(1) The first syllable or half-foot of a line of blank verse is often accented and cut off from the rest of the line by a pause, to indicate some sudden emphatic action or startling sight or sound, breaking the flow of the narrative—an effect often employed by Homer:

his arms

Clash'd : and the sound was good to Gareth's ear  
(*Gareth and Lynette*)

Charm'd, till Sir Kay, the seneschal, would come  
(*Ib.*)

Shock, that a man far-off might well perceive  
(*Lancelot and Elaine*)

Flash'd, and he call'd, 'I fight upon thy side'  
(*Pelleas and Etarre*)

Back, as a hand that pushes thro' the leaf  
(*Ib.*)

Fall, as the crest of some slow-arching wave  
Drops flat (The Last Tournament).

Occasionally the whole first foot is thus cut off:

made his horse

Caracole : then bowed his homage, bluntly saying  
(*Ib.*)

Who stood a moment, ere his horse was brought,  
Glorying: and in the stream beneath him shone  
(*Gareth and Lynette*).

(2) Action rapidly repeated is represented by an unusual number of unaccented syllables in one line. Thus we almost hear the huddling flow of waters in such lines as

Myriads of rivulets hurrying thro' the lawn  
(*The Princess*)  
Of some precipitous rivulet to the sea  
(*Enoch Arden*).

The rapid warble of song-birds sounds through

Melody on branch and melody in mid-air  
(*Gareth and Lynette*)  
and in the same *Idyll*, the quick beat of a horse's hoof is echoed in

The sound of many a heavily galloping hoof.

(3) Contrast with the above the majestic effect produced by the sustained rhythm and the broad vowel sounds in

By the long wash of Australasian seas  
(*The Brook*)  
The league-long roller thundering on the reef  
(*Enoch Arden*).

(4) Variations from the usual iambic regularity of blank verse, attained by placing the accent on the first instead of on the second half-foot, are introduced, often to represent intermittent action, as in

Dówn the lóng tówer-stáirs, hésítáting  
(*Lancelot and Elaine*).

(h) His melody  
of diction.

(h) Tennyson's sense of music is equally conspicuous in the melody of his diction. The mere sound of his words and phrases lingers in the brain, apart from any meaning, as the echoes of a musical cadence linger along a vaulted roof. This is in the main due to his selection of melodious vowels and liquid consonants, and also to his skilful use of alliteration. Examples are everywhere :

The moan of doves in immemorial elms,  
And murmuring of innumerable bees  
(*The Princess*)

The lustre of the long convolvuluses  
(*Enoch Arden*)

The long low dune and lazy plunging sea  
(*The Last Tournament*)

Breast-high in that bright line of bracken stood  
(*Pelleas and Etarre*)

All day the wind breathes low with mellow tone  
Through every hollow cave and alley lone  
(*The Lotos Eaters*).

Contrast with the liquid sounds in the above the representative effect produced by the short, sharp vowels and the guttural and dental sounds in

And on the spike that split the mother's heart  
Spitting the child  
(*The Coming of Arthur*)

The blade flew  
Splintering in six, and clinked upon the stones  
(*Balin and Balan*)

Then spluttering thro' the hedge of splinter'd teeth,  
Yet strangers to the tongue, and with blunt stump  
Pitch-blackened sawing the air  
(*The Last Tournament*).

In double words initial alliteration is conspicuous:—*breaker-beaten, flesh-fall'n, gloomy-gladed, lady-laden, mock-meek, point-painted, rain-rotten, storm-strengthen'd, tongue-torn, work-wan*. We also find *slowly-mellowing, hollower-bellowing, ever-veering, heavy-shotted hammock-shroud*. Often, as Mr. G. C. Macaulay has noticed, Tennyson's alliteration is so delicate that we "only feel that it is there without perceiving where it is," and it is then, perhaps, due to no conscious effort of the poet, but is as natural as the melody of a bird. In no English poet, perhaps only in Homer and Virgil, is this kinship of poetry and music so evident as in Tennyson.

Tennyson's three historical dramas form (as Mr. Henry Van Dyke has pointed out) a picture of the Making of England, the three periods of action being, it would seem, chosen with the design of touching the most critical points of the long struggle. Thus in *Harold* we see "the close of that fierce triangular duel between the Saxons, the Danes, and the Normans, which resulted in the Norman conquest and the binding of England, still Saxon at heart, to the civilization of the Continent." In *Becket* we have "the conflict between the church and the crown, between the ecclesiastical and the royal prerogatives, which shook England to the centre for many years, and out of which her present constitution has grown." In *Queen Mary*, when the triumph of church and people had left undecided what type of religion was to prevail, is pictured the struggle between the Papacy and the Reformation for the possession of England. All three plays are full of deep

His Dramatic  
Works.

research, vivid character-painting, and intensity of feeling, and contain many magnificent situations. George Eliot has expressed her opinion that "Tennyson's plays run Shakspere's close," and Robert Browning used to point out the scene of the oath over the bones of the Saints of Normandy, in *Harold*, as a marvellously actable scene; while Mr. J. R. Green, the historian, has told us that "all his researches into the annals of the twelfth century had not given him so vivid a conception of the character of Henry II. and his court as was embodied in Tennyson's *Becket*." It should at the same time be remembered that (as the poet himself avows) this drama is "not intended in its present form to meet the exigencies of the modern theatre," a criticism which may be applied with more or less force to the whole trilogy. *Becket* has been adapted for the stage by Mr. Irving, and performed with great success; and *The Cup* and *The Falcon* were each played during a London season to full houses. *Queen Mary*, *The Promise of May*, and *The Foresters* have also been acted.

**Conclusion.**

Such is Tennyson as man and as artist. His poetry, with its clearness of conception and noble simplicity of expression, its discernment of the beautiful and its power of revealing and shaping it with mingled strength and harmony, has become an integral part of the literature of the world, and so long as purity and loftiness of thought expressed in perfect form have power to charm, will remain a possession for ever.

## INTRODUCTION TO IDYLLS OF THE KING.

Cycles of Romance—King Arthur in History—Arthurian Cycle in English Literature—Arthurian Cycle in Tennyson's Poems—The title "Idylls"—Spiritual significance of the *Idylls of the King*—The *Idylls* not a mere Allegory—Anachronism—The ideal Arthur—The *Idylls* completed—Unity of design—Significance of individual Idylls.

Two great kings, Arthur of England and Charlemagne of France, were made in the middle ages the centres of two great cycles or systems of Romance. Each cycle presented its king as the visible head of Christendom, and arrayed around him a fellowship of knights. The chief of these knights was in each cycle distinguished above his fellows, and made the type of manly valour and chivalric virtue, Lancelot, 'the flower of chivalry' of Arthur's Round Table, corresponding to Orlando (or Roland), the chief of Charlemagne's Paladins: so also Guinevere, 'the pearl of beauty' in Arthur's court, has her counterpart in her whom Milton (*Par. Reg.* iii. 341) calls

Arthurian and  
Carlovingian  
Cycles of  
Romance.

The fairest of her sex, Angelica,  
. . . sought by many prowrest knights,  
Both Paynim and the peers of Charlemain.

Common to both cycles are the ideas of far-spreading conquest and of unity of empire under a single head,

Charlemagne's historical annexations being paralleled by a mythical expedition of Arthur, which reached as far as Rome, and brought the capital of the West under his sway. And the career of Charlemagne, like that of Arthur, ends in mystery; as Arthur (according to the legendary epitaph on his tomb at Glastonbury, 'Hic jacet Arturus rex quondam rexque futurus') passes 'to come again,' so Charlemagne is described as sitting in Odenberg, crowned and armed, till the time of his second coming to deliver Christendom from Antichrist. The resemblance of the two cycles runs into a number of minor details: in both the chief knight passes through a prolonged term of madness, and even the magic brand *Excalibur* has its match in Charlemagne's famous sword *Durindana*.

Moreover, the moral systems of the two cycles are closely allied. In each

Shine martial Faith and Courtesy's clear star ;

and in each "noble men may see and learn the noble acts of chivalry, the gentle and virtuous deeds that some knights used in those days by which they came to honour, and how they that were vicious were punished and oft put to shame and rebuke" (Caxton's Preface to Malory's *Morte d'Arthur*). Such difference of teaching as is to be noticed between the two cycles may be due in great part to the different channels through which they have come down to us. Ariosto and Bojardo, the Italian romancists, in whose pages we now read the Carlovingian story, gave the brilliant and vivid colour of their own times, and of the civilization of the later middle age, to the rude material they found

in the early legends. Malory, the compiler of the English *Morte d'Arthur*, brings us into closer and fresher contact with the original form and spirit of the ancient legends. Thus we find that the Romance of the Round Table, far ruder as a work of skill than the Italian presentment of Charlemagne and his Paladins, has more of the simplicity and inconsistency of childhood; the ascetic element is more strongly and quaintly developed; it presents a higher conception of the nature of woman, a more distinct sense of sin, and a broader, more manly view of human life and duty.

The mythical tales that have gathered round the name of Charlemagne deal with a personage whose conquests are matters of authentic history; but regarding Arthur little of real fact has been ascertained; all that modern research can tell us with any certainty is that there was in the sixth century a war-leader in Britain called Artus or Arthur, who, after the departure of the Romans, headed the tribes of Cumbria and Strathclyde (the old divisions of Western Britain, stretching from the Severn to the Clyde) against the encroaching Saxons from the east and the Picts and Scots from the north; and that five or six centuries later "the name of King Arthur had come to stand for an ideal of royal wisdom, chivalric virtue, and knightly prowess which was recognised alike in England, France, and Germany."

The Arthurian cycle has afforded materials for many romancists and poets, both English and foreign: its development in English literature may be clearly traced.

The earliest legends of Arthur are to be found in the *Welsh Tales*, in the Breton and German *Romances*, and

King Arthur  
in History.

The Arthurian  
Cycle in  
English  
Literature.



in *Chronicles* such as that of St. Gildas de Ruys, *De Excidio Britanniae*.

Between 1130 and 1147 Geoffrey of Monmouth, "the veracious Geoffrey," gave a long account of Arthur's exploits in his *Historia Britonum*, a fabulous Latin chronicle of the Cymry and their kings. The popularity of this History gave a new currency to the stories: Geoffrey's work was turned into French verse by Gaimar, and also, with many additional details about Arthur, by Wace, a Jersey poet. The legends up to this point recounted deeds of mere animal courage and passion.

About 1196 Walter Map (or Mapes), a chaplain to Henry II., and subsequently Archdeacon of Oxford, gave spiritual life to the whole system of Arthurian romance by blending with it the legend of the *Quest of the Holy Graal*. The 'Holy Graal' (or Grail, as Tennyson spells it) was, we are told, the cup or dish used by Christ at the Last Supper, and subsequently by Joseph of Arimathea to catch the blood of Christ as He was hanging wounded on the cross. The word *grail*, old French *graal*, low Latin *gradale*, is allied to the Greek *κρητήρ*, a cup. The derivation of *Sancgraal*, from *Sanguis realis* (= the *real blood* of Christ), is erroneous, and arose from a wrong spelling and division of letters, *sancgraal* being mistakenly written *san grael*, and then *sang real*. Joseph brought the dish with him to Glastonbury, in England, where it was lost;\* the search for it, the

\* There is still preserved in the cathedral of Genoa a hexagonal dish, of the colour and brilliance of emerald; it is called *Sacro Catino*, and local traditions maintain that this is the original *grail*.

'Quest of the Holy Grail,' was undertaken by many of the knights of the Round Table, and to some of them a sight of it, accompanied by the holy sacrament and the Real Presence of Christ, was granted. The legend thus became an allegory of a man's striving after a perfect knowledge of Truth and of God, to be gained only by a life of ideal purity. (See Tennyson's *Idyll of The Holy Grail*.) From the introduction of the Grail legend we must date the elevation of King Arthur to the place he has since held as a Christian monarch ruling over an essentially religious people.

In 1470 Sir Thomas Malory (or 'Malleor,' as Tennyson calls him) used the materials he found in "many noble volumes; . . . in Welsh be many and also in French and some in English" for the making of his "book of King Arthur and of his noble knights of the Round Table." The book is called by Caxton, who printed it in 1485, "thys noble and Joyous book entytled le Morte Darthur"; and in his preface thereto the printer says that it contains "many joyous and pleasant histories and noble and renowned acts of humanity, gentleness and chivalry." Malory's book is for the modern reader the most accessible and best known storehouse of Arthurian legend. Upon this Tennyson has founded some of his *Idylls of the King*. The closeness with which the poet has in many instances followed his original is illustrated by the parallel passages quoted from Malory in the Notes at the end of this volume.

Other poets have taken, or thought of taking, Arthur as the central hero of their chief work. Spenser, in his *Faerie Queene*, makes 'Prince Arthure' the type of 'magnificence,' i.e. 'noble doing'; and under the figure

of Arthure's knights represents the various virtues striving heavenwards and helped on their way by their Prince.

Milton originally intended to take as the heroes of a great national epic—

indigenas reges . . .

Arturumque etiam sub terris bella moventem,

but, sharing the common doubt of most writers in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries as to "who he was and whether any such reigned in history," rejected the *Round Table* as a subject in favour of the Loss of Paradise.

Blackmore wrote two epics—*Prince Arthur*, in ten books, and *King Arthur*, in twelve books.

Dryden produced a dramatic opera which he entitled *King Arthur*, but it was really nothing more than an allegory of the events of the reign of Charles II. In his *Essay on Satire* he gives a melancholy account of a projected epic, with either King Arthur or Edward the Black Prince as hero. In allusion to these writers, Sir Walter Scott, in his *Introduction to Marmion*, tells how the "mightiest chiefs of British song" felt the fascination of the Arthurian legends—

They gleam through Spenser's elfin dream,  
And mix in Milton's heavenly theme;  
And Dryden, in immortal strain,  
Had raised the Table Round again,  
But that a ribald king and court  
Bade him toil on to make them sport.

Scott himself felt a similar attraction towards this "ancient minstrel strain." He edited, with notes, Thomas the Rhymer's metrical romance, *Sir Tristrem*,

and introduced into his own *Bridal of Triermaine* a story of King Arthur's love for a fairy princess.

In 1838 Lady Charlotte Guest published *The Mabinogion*, a translation into English of the Welsh legends contained in "the red book of Hergerst," which is in the library of Jesus College, Oxford. From the *Mabinogion* Tennyson has taken the story of his Idyll of *Geraint and Enid*.

In 1848 Bulwer-Lytton produced an epic, in six-lined stanzas, entitled *King Arthur*.

On Tennyson the Arthurian Romance began, very early in his life, to exercise a strong fascination. We are told that, when quite a boy, he chanced upon a copy of Malory's book, and often with his brothers held mimic tournaments after the fashion of knights of the Round Table. So early as 1832 he published *The Lady of Shalott*, the incidents of which afterwards formed the framework of the Idyll of *Elaine*. Ten years later his *Morte d'Arthur* appeared; an introduction to this poem represented it as a fragment of a long epic, all the rest of which, as being "faint Homeric echoes, nothing worth," the author had thrown into the fire. Five years previously to this publication Walter Savage Landor, who had heard the *Morte d'Arthur* read aloud from manuscript, wrote: "It is more Homeric than any poem of our time, and rivals some of the noblest poetry in the *Odyssey*." Two shorter Arthurian poems, *Sir Galahad* and *Lancelot and Guinevere*, were contained in the same volume with *Morte d'Arthur*. The first issue of *Idylls of the King*, comprising only four Idylls—*Enid*, *Vivien*, *Elaine*, and *Guinevere*—appeared in 1859. The remaining Idylls were published at intervals between 1869 and 1872, with the exception of *Balin and Balan*,

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‘an introduction to *Merlin and Vivien*,’ contained with other poems in a volume given to the world in 1885. The original fragment, *Morte d’Arthur*, now forms part of the last Idyll, *The Passing of Arthur*.

The title  
“Idylls.”

‘Idyll,’ from εἶδος, εἰδύλλιον, ‘a little picture,’ was the title originally used in Greek Literature for short picturesque poems, such as the Idylls of Theocritus the Sicilian (B.C. 280); these generally depict common incidents in the life of simple folk in country or in town—the loves and jealousies of shepherds, the toils of fishermen, or sight-seeings in a great city. Later imitators of Theocritus (Vergil, for example) took rural life almost exclusively as the scenery of their Idylls: hence ‘idyllic’ is now generally understood as implying an idealised rusticity, the simplicity of the country without its coarseness. So Tennyson calls the shepherd love-song, quoted by Ida in *The Princess*, “a small sweet Idyl,”<sup>1</sup> and has given the title of “English Idylls” to poems like his *Dora*, *The Gardener’s Daughter*, and *Sea Dreams*. But the term ‘Idyll’ may rightly be used of any ‘picture poem,’ that is, a poem which gives a highly-wrought and complete representation of any scene of life and has for its motive one leading sentiment. The *Idylls of the King* are not pastoral poems: they are of a loftier and nobler strain and are informed with a more serious purpose. Each *Idyll* is complete in itself as presenting a separate picture, but each at the same time fills its place in a con-

<sup>1</sup>The old spelling was *idyl*, with one *l*. The double *l*, which better recalls the Greek original, served when first adopted to distinguish heroic descriptive poems from pastorals like those of Theocritus. This distinction is no longer observed, the modern spelling *idyll* being in general use,

nected series grouped round a central figure. The twelve books of the *Idylls of the King* form one great Poem, characterised by Epic unity of design and grandeur of tone: they present a full cycle of heroic story and have a rightful claim to be known as the "Epic of Arthur."

The spiritual significance which is seen to be so "deeply interfused" through this great poem, now that it can be studied as a completed work of art, was naturally not so evident in the detached instalments first published. They were regarded as "rich pictorial fancies taken, certainly not at random, but without any really coherent design, out of a great magazine of romantic story" (Hutton, *Literary Essays*), and were read with delight for their "exquisite magnificence of style," as Swinburne calls it, the elaborate melody of rhythm, the richness and truth of illustration, and the grandeur of tone that marked them. And, indeed, apart from any secondary significance which they are meant to contain, the lover of poetry and romance will always feel the intrinsic charm both in the form and in the substance of these tales of "wonder and woe, of amorous devotion and fierce conflict and celestial vision." It is for the story and the style that each Idyll should first be read; their 'moral' is best reserved for separate, subsequent consideration. Accordingly, the reader of this volume has in the Notes been referred to this Introduction for explanation of any significance deeper than that which is evident on the surface of the poems. This significance is never obtruded by the poet, and it is only in his epilogue *To the Queen* that he tells us of the grand moral purpose which is now recognised as clearly

The spiritual  
significance of  
the *Idylls of  
the King*.

and consistently running through the whole set of *Idylls*.  
He there describes the work as an

. . . . . old imperfect tale,  
New-old, and shadowing Sense at war with Soul,  
Rather than that gray king, whose name, a ghost,  
Streams like a cloud, man-shaped, from mountain peak,  
And cleaves to cairn and cromlech still; or him  
Of Geoffrey's book, or him of Malleor's, one  
Touch'd by the adulterous finger of a time  
That hover'd between war and wantonness,  
And crownings and dethronements.

The King Arthur of the *Idylls* is something more than a model of kingly virtue and knightly prowess, and the story of the founding and the dissolution of the Round Table is not solely a narrative of romantic adventure, and of the loves, the passions, and the sins of knights and ladies. These *Idylls* reflect the eternal struggle in the life of mankind of good against evil, of the spiritual against the sensual element of our nature; that conflict which St. Paul (Bible, *Rom.* vii. 23) describes as the law in our members warring against the law of our mind. A personal friend of the poet's, Mrs. Thackeray Ritchie, daughter of Thackeray, himself also an intimate friend of Tennyson's, has written as follows regarding the scope of the *Idylls*: "If *In Memoriam* is the record of a human soul, the *Idylls* mean the history, not of one man or of one generation, but of a whole cycle, of the faith of a nation failing and falling away into darkness. 'It is the dream of man coming into practical life, and ruined by one sin.' Birth is a mystery, and death is a mystery, and in the midst lies the table-land of life, and its struggle and performance." The *Idylls* them-

selves are not devoid of definite, outspoken testimony to their own inner meaning. In *Guinevere* Arthur himself recounts how on founding the Order of the Round Table he made his knights swear

To reverence the king, as if he were  
Their conscience, and their conscience as their king,

and later in the same Idyll the repentant queen, recognising at last the height of Arthur's purity, cries

“Ah great and gentle lord,  
Who wast, as is the conscience of a saint  
Among his warring senses, to thy knights.”

Yet the poem is not a mere allegory. Arthur and his knights and the ladies of his court are not abstractions of ideal qualities: they are real men and women, with human feelings and trials and conflicts: they do represent and embody certain virtues and vices, but these qualities work and live in their work and their lives. Some purely allegorical figures are, indeed, introduced, as that of the Lady of the Lake personifying Religion; and in the visions of Percival in *The Holy Grail* there is more of symbolism than reality. But these figures and visions are clearly distinct from the human *personæ* of the stories.

*The Idylls not  
a mere  
allegory.*

Arthur, then, is a man in whom the higher instincts of his nature dominate the lower, and whose whole life is governed by the law within. He is, as Guinevere too late acknowledges, “the highest and most human too.” The kingdom which “for a space” he establishes, and which in spite of downfall he will come to establish again, is the rule of conscience; and in his coming, his



foundation of the Round Table "for love of God and men," his continued endeavour to keep his knights true to their vows, his failure, and his mysterious passing which is not death, we see a reflection of the conflict eternally waged in human life between the spirit and the flesh "with the lusts thereof." Arthur's visible enemies are the heathen, whom he overcomes; but more subtle foes than the heathen are the evil passions and the mystic delusions of his own Christian court and household, which in the end prevail over and ruin his "boundless purpose."

Anachronism  
in the setting  
of the story in  
Malory and in  
Tennyson.

Tennyson's disavowal of an historical intention such as is characteristic of the true Epic, has been quoted above. Indeed, the legends themselves, as read in Malory's book, make no pretence to chronological truth: even Malory's setting of the stories belongs to times near his own rather than to the times which he tells of, to the age of chivalry and the Crusades rather than to the rude simplicity of the real Arthur's era, to the twelfth rather than to the sixth century. The author of the *Idylls* in his turn has gone still further, and while preserving from Malory the scenic accessories of tilt and tournament and heraldic device, as well as the chivalric virtues of courtesy and reverence for womanhood, has placed the court of Arthur in a mental and moral atmosphere not far remote from that in which the poet's own contemporaries move. As the pomp and circumstance and the refinement of chivalry in Malory's compilation are foreign to the times of the ancient British war-leader, so the self-questioning of Tristram and the philosophies of Dagonet, for example, in *The Last Tournament*, are a development quite beyond the purview of Malory's times.

Tennyson has taken the dim personages of the early annals, surrounded as he found them in Malory by the romantic glamour and mysticism of a later age, and has idealised them still further to suit his own poetic purpose and the advanced thought of the nineteenth century.

It must not, however, be forgotten that the idea of Arthur as a type of half-divine manhood and supreme kingliness is no invention of Tennyson's. "Flos Regum Arturus," Arthur the Flower of Kings, the motto prefixed to the *Idylls*, is a phrase from the old chronicler, Joseph of Exeter, who also writes: "The old world knows not his peer, nor will the future show us his equal: he alone towers over all other kings, better than the past ones, and greater than those that are to be." Caxton, in his preface to Malory's *Morte Darthur*, uses similar language: "For in all places, Christian and heathen, he is taken for one of the nine worthy, and the first of the three Christian men." This halo of spiritual glory is, both in the Chronicles and in Malory's book, crossed and blurred by sin and shame; but such a stigma is inconsistent with the ideal perfection also ascribed to Arthur's character, and even in Malory's presentment it leaves no taint on the king's later career. After the elevation of the older stories, by the blending with them of the Christian mysticism of the Sangraal legends, the unearthly excellence of the king is the stronger element, and overrules the admixture of crime and retribution.

It is this view of Arthur that Tennyson has adopted; and it was necessary to reject the inconsistent evil before any coherent design of the character could be formed for the purpose of a modern Arthuriad. One hint is given

The ideal Arthur an original conception of the old chroniclers.

Tennyson's development of the ideal character of Arthur.

of human frailty in Arthur in early life: see *Merlin and Vivien*. The "pure severity of perfect light" in which in manhood the "blameless king and stainless man" of Tennyson's *Idylls* moves, as in his proper element, is the natural development of the loftier spirit infused in the tenth century into the old Chroniclers' conception of Arthur's character: the new leaven was bound to work until it had leavened the whole lump.

The *Idylls*  
in their  
complete  
form.

The *Idylls of the King* as now published comprise the *Dedication* to the Prince Consort,

Hereafter through all times Albert the Good—

—*The Coming of Arthur*—ten *Idylls* grouped together under the general title of *The Round Table*—*The Passing of Arthur* and an epilogue *To the Queen*. The first *Idyll* and the last are thus separated from the ten intermediate poems, and deal, the one with the birth of Arthur and his founding of the great Order, and the other with the king's last battle and his passing from earth. They thus differ in subject from the *Idylls* treating of Arthur's knights and the ladies of his court, and this difference is marked in their style, which is intentionally archaic.

Unity of  
design of the  
*Idylls*.

Yet the unity of design of the whole series of *Idylls* clearly appears: it is seen not only in the gradually developed story of one great sin and its spreading taint, but also in incidental features. Thus the story in its course runs through the seasons of one complete year, the phases of Nature in their succession forming a background for the successive scenes of the poem. In *The Coming of Arthur* we read that it was on the "night of the new year" that Arthur was born. Gareth, in the next *Idyll*, starts on his quest of glory at the dawn of a

spring morning; the melody of birds sounds around him,  
and under foot

The live green had kindled into flowers,  
For it was past the time of Easterday.

The marriage of Arthur and Guinevere (described in *The Coming of Arthur*) takes place amid the flowers in May. In *The Marriage of Geraint* and its continuation, *Geraint and Enid*, the action of the characters begins "on a summer morn," and later in the poem we come to the mowers at work, while the sun blazes on the turning scythe. Summer is further advanced in *Balin and Balan* and in *Merlin and Vivien*: at the outset Merlin, as he crosses the fields, is "foot-gilt" with "blossom-dust," and in the concluding scene a summer tempest breaks overhead. In *Lancelot and Elaine* the blossoming meadow has given place to a field that "shone full-summer," and we read of "the casement standing wide for heat." The summer is not yet past in the next two Idylls: it is "on a summer night" that the vision of the Holy Grail appears to the assembled knights. *Pelleas and Etarre* is the last of the summer Idylls: the sun beats "like a strong man" on the young knight's helm, and, later, we have the mellow moon and the roses of the waning season. In *The Last Tournament* autumn, with its "yellowing woods" and "withered leaf," succeeds, and the scene closes "all in a death-dumb, autumn-dripping gloom." The last of the *Round Table* Idylls shows us Guinevere's flight at a time when the white mist of early winter clings to the dead earth. And, finally, the last weird battle in *The Passing of Arthur* is fought

when the great light of heaven  
Burn'd at his lowest in the rolling year.

The wounded king is carried at midnight across rocks covered with the ice of the dead of winter; and he passes away from earth when the mystic year has rolled full circle. The "new Sun" now rises to usher in a "new year," and a different era:

The old order changeth, yielding place to new.

Spiritual  
significance  
of *The Coming  
of Arthur.*

The more particular significance of the incidents and characters in the first Idyll, *The Coming of Arthur*, may now be considered. The mystery of Arthur's birth points to the searchings of heart, the difficulties, and the doubts which ever accompany any human conception of the origin of spiritual authority and of duty; and the different views taken of that mystery aptly represent the varieties of soil upon which the seed of any new gospel must fall. Some will always be found to talk and act in direct opposition to him who would lead them to higher things, and to say, as the scribes of Jerusalem said of Christ, "He hath Beelzebub, and by the prince of the devils casteth he out devils":—

For there be those who hate him in their hearts,  
Call him baseborn, and since his ways are sweet  
And theirs are bestial, call him less than man.

In contrast with such base-minded foes we have the dreamy belief of the spiritually-minded mystic—

And there be those who deem him more than man,  
And dream him dropp'd from heaven,

—for the mystic is always "seeking for a sign," and prone to look for the immediate interposition of supernatural agency.

Another class of minds, which may be placed midway between the base opponents and the mystic believers, is

represented by Bedivere. This honest knight troubles himself but little with doubts or portents, and sees no reason to question or prove the truth of a message which comes to him with the sanction of common sense and at the same time satisfies his own ideal. His recognition of the significance of the message and its higher aspects may be dim and partial, but his obedience is thorough and practical. To this class also Bellicent belongs: although, woman-like, she feels a curiosity which she asks Merlin to satisfy regarding the reported wonders of

The shining dragon and the naked child,  
yet speaking of the king to her son she says that she  
doubted him

No more than he himself.

In the Coronation scene many of the details have a distinctly symbolic reference. The "three fair queens," with the light from the pictured cross falling upon them, probably typify the three Christian virtues, Faith, Hope, Charity. Mage Merlin, "who knew the range of all their arts," may aptly symbolise the Intellect: his knowledge ranges over all human philosophy, but, as his fate, described in *Merlin and Vivien*, shows, it is knowledge without moral restraint or spiritual strength.

The Lady of the Lake, who stands near Merlin, "knows a subtler magic than his own," inasmuch as the power of Religion\* is based on deeper and stronger

\* In the Idyll of *Gareth and Lynette* a description is given of a statue of the Lady of the Lake, standing on the keystone of a gate of Camelot: the figure is embellished with many Christian emblems: its arms are stretched out like a cross, drops of baptismal water flow from its hands, from which also hang a censer and a sword, and the "sacred fish" floats on its breast. The last

foundations than those of any philosophy that science can teach. She is clothed in white, the colour of purity: incense, the emblem of adoration, curls about her: her face is half hidden in the "dim religious light" of the holy place: her voice mingles with the hymns, and, like the voice of the great multitude saying Alleluia, heard by St. John in the Revelation, sounds "as the voice of many waters": her dwelling is in eternal calm, where storms cannot reach her: and as our Lord walked on the Galilean waves and stilled their tumult, she can pass over the troubled waters of life and calm them with her footsteps.

The sword which she gives to Arthur is cross-hilted: see Note to *The Coming of Arthur*, l. 285. It is the "sword of the spirit," to be used against the superstitions and falsehoods of heathendom. Its jewelled ornament, like the Urim and Thummim of the Jewish high priest, is emblematic of mystic help and guidance from a heavenly source.

The inner significance of the poem is further illustrated by Merlin's riddling response to Bellicent's question and by Leodogran's dream about Arthur, both of which are treated of in the Notes: also by the "dark sayings from of old," which speak of the king; these represent the vague oracular forecasts which, after the advent of any of the world's great teachers, are often said to have gone before it.

emblem was one in use among the early Christians: noticing that the initial letters of the phrase, Ἰησοῦς Χριστὸς Θεοῦ Υἱὸς Σωτὴρ, formed the word ΙΧΘΥΣ, fish, they adopted the word and the form of a fish as Christian symbols. These may be seen cut on tombs in the Catacombs of Rome.

Before proceeding to the secondary significance of *The Passing of Arthur*, it will be convenient to trace the development of the design of the poem through the intermediate group of Idylls.

In *Gareth and Lynette* the golden age of Arthur's reign is depicted, before the taint of moral poison in the sin of Lancelot and Guinevere has begun to be felt. The vows of utter hardihood, utter gentleness, utter faithfulness in love, and uttermost obedience to the king are loyally kept by the whole Order, and true chivalry flourishes in all its splendour. Gareth himself is full of the enthusiasm of youth and of eagerness to serve the true king, willing to accept the humblest duty for the sake of glory. His achievement, the deliverance of the captive of Castle Perilous, is something more than a specimen of the work of the Round Table in redressing human wrong: it is also an image in miniature of the "boundless purpose of the king," the deliverance of the soul from bondage to the flesh.

In *The Marriage of Geraint* and *Geraint and Enid*, which were originally printed as one Idyll, the taint of impurity first shows itself; suspicions of his wife's honour are bred in Geraint's mind by rumours of the queen's unfaithfulness.

In *Balin and Balan*, these rumours have gained greater currency and strength, and the final catastrophe, the death of the two brothers, is due to the shattering of their faith in Guinevere's purity.

The taint comes into clearer light in *Merlin and Vivien*. The "vast wit and hundred winters" of the great Enchanter, shrewdness and knowledge and long experience, unsupported by moral strength, are powerless to with-

Spiritual  
significance of  
the "Round  
Table" Idylls.



stand the seductions of fleshly lusts. In these four Idylls the seeds of sin are sown.

In the next, *Lancelot and Elaine*, the bitter fruit ripens: the death of Elaine, the "simple heart and sweet," is directly due to Lancelot's false truth to his guilty passion for the queen.

In *The Holy Grail* a new element of failure is introduced: the knights, misled by vague dreams and mystic enthusiasm, desert the plain and practical duties of common life to "follow wandering fires," and true faith is lost in the delusions of superstition.

*Pelleas and Etarre* shows us the pure and loyal trust of a young life turned to bitterness and despair by sad experience of the prevailing corruption.

The triumph of the senses is complete in *The Last Tournament*: Tristram, the victor in "The Tournament of the Dead Innocence," openly scoffs at the king and his vows, and the glory of the Round Table is no more: one faithful follower is left to Arthur, and he is the court fool.

In *Guinevere* we see that sin has done its work, and the smouldering scandal breaks and blazes before the people: the Order is splintered into feuds, the realm falls to ruin, and Arthur goes forth to meet his mysterious doom.

Spiritual  
significance of  
*The Passing  
of Arthur.*

The concluding Idyll, *The Passing of Arthur*, tells of the last battle and the end of Arthur's earthly life. The king's "sensuous frame is racked with pangs that conquer trust," but there is no lessening of fortitude, no weakening of will—

"Nay, God, my Christ, I pass but cannot die."

In the conflict that precedes the last dread hour confusion and "formless fear" may fall upon the soul

when it stands forlorn amid the wrecks of its lofty purposes, and prepares to face the unknown future. But though Arthur sees full well the failure of all the purposes of his throne, his faith is not shaken : he can still say

“King am I, whatsoever be their cry,”

and the last stroke with Excalibur, which slays a traitor, fitly crowns a life of kingly and knightly achievement. The lines which follow, from

So all day long the noise of battle roll'd,  
down to

And on the mere the wailing died away,

formed the original fragment *Morte d'Arthur*. The symbolism in this portion of the Idyll is less prominent, and the story is told with Homeric simplicity and directness. Excalibur, when now no use remains for it on earth, is reclaimed by the Lady of the Lake, that it may equip the king in other regions ; for the life and energy of the soul do not end when it passes from earth. The cries of triumphant acclaim, sounding from beyond the limit of the world, to welcome the wounded king to his isle of rest and healing, recall Leodogran's vision of the king standing crowned in heaven. Arthur's earthly realm may “reel back into the beast,” and his Round Table may be dissolved ; but his purity is untarnished, his honour is without stain, and the ideal which he has striven to realise has lost none of its inward vitality and significance. As he passes from earth to “vanish into light,” he already gives a forecast of his return as the representative of the new chivalry, when he shall come

With all good things, and war shall be no more.

Lancelot, as Mr. Elsdale\* has remarked, is the central figure of this Idyll; he stands, as it were, between Guinevere and Elaine, who both loved him so well, but so differently. We are introduced to the man himself, as gallant and courteous as ever, but with face marred by the long conflict between his love for the Queen and his loyalty to his lord, and often fiend-driven by his mood "into wastes and solitudes for agony." A saddened and disappointed man, he feels that the retribution that follows sin is closing in upon him. On either side of him stand the contrasted figures of the two women—the one of peerless beauty and queenly dignity and splendour, but voluptuous and sin-stained; the other a simple rustic maiden, full of artless sweetness and purity. In his treatment of his subject, the poet trusts to the "effect of alternating light and shadow, to the artistic harmonies and contrasts produced by rapidly changing sequence and grouping of his incidents." He generally leads us rapidly on, therefore, from scene to scene—Elaine tending Lancelot's shield, then the finding of the diamonds in the haunted glen, then Lancelot at the court, then a rural scene in the castle of Astolat, and so on; the characteristic scene of the whole poem being the striking scene between Guinevere and Lancelot in the vine-clad oriel of Arthur's palace, with its strongly contrasted aspects. "At the window above we see fallen Guinevere, the sinful agent, in the vehement action and life of unhallowed passion;—below spotless Elaine, the sinless sufferer, in the calm repose and death of sacred affection."

\* *Studies in the Idylls.*

## LANCELOT AND ELAINE.

ELAINE the fair, Elaine the loveable,  
Elaine, the lily maid of Astolat,  
High in her chamber up a tower to the east  
Guarded the sacred shield of Lancelot ;  
Which first she placed where morning's earliest ray  
Might strike it, and awake her with the gleam ;  
Then, fearing rust or soilure fashion'd for it  
A case of silk, and braided thereupon  
All the devices blazon'd on the shield  
In their own tinct, and added, of her wit, 10  
A border fantasy of branch and flower,  
And yellow-throated nestling in the nest.  
Nor rested thus content, but day by day,  
Leaving her household and good father, climb'd  
That eastern tower, and entering barr'd her door,  
Stript off the case, and read the naked shield,  
Now guess'd a hidden meaning in his arms,  
Now made a pretty history to herself  
Of every dint a sword had beaten in it,  
And every scratch a lance had made upon it, 20  
Conjecturing when and where : this cut is fresh ;  
That ten years back ; this dealt him at Caerlyle ;  
That at Caerleon ; this at Camelot :  
And ah God's mercy, what a stroke was there !  
And here a thrust that might have kill'd, but God

Broke the strong lance, and roll'd his enemy down,  
And saved him : so she lived in fantasy.

How came the lily maid by that good shield  
Of Lancelot, she that knew not ev'n his name ?  
He left it with her, when he rode to tilt 30  
For the great diamond in the diamond jousts,  
Which Arthur had ordain'd, and by that name  
Had named them, since a diamond was the prize.

For Arthur, long before they crown'd him King,  
Roving the trackless realms of Lyonesse,  
Had found a glen, gray boulder and black tarn.  
A horror lived about the tarn, and clave  
Like its own mists to all the mountain side :  
For here two brothers, one a king, had met  
And fought together ; but their names were lost ; 40  
And each had slain his brother at a blow ;  
And down they fell and made the glen abhorr'd :  
And there they lay till all their bones were bleach'd,  
And lichen'd into colour with the crags :  
And he, that once was king, had on a crown  
Of diamonds, one in front, and four aside.  
And Arthur came, and labouring up the pass,  
All in a misty moonshine, unawares  
Had trodden that crown'd skeleton, and the skull  
Brake from the nape, and from the skull the crown  
Roll'd into light, and turning on its rims 51  
Fled like a glittering rivulet to the tarn :  
And down the shingly scaur he plunged, and caught,  
And set it on his head, and in his heart  
Heard murmurs, 'Lo, thou likewise shalt be King.'

Thereafter, when a King, he had the gems  
Pluck'd from the crown, and show'd them to his  
knights,

Saying, 'These jewels, whereupon I chanced  
 Divinely, are the kingdom's, not the King's—  
 For public use: henceforward let there be, 60  
 Once every year, a joust for one of these :  
 For so by nine years' proof we needs must learn  
 Which is our mightiest, and ourselves shall grow  
 In use of arms and manhood, till we drive  
 The heathen, who, some say, shall rule the land  
 Hereafter, which God hinder.' Thus he spoke :  
 And eight years past, eight jousts had been, and still  
 Had Lancelot won the diamond of the year,  
 With purpose to present them to the Queen,  
 When all were won ; but meaning all at once 70  
 To snare her royal fancy with a boon  
 Worth half her realm, had never spoken word.

Now for the central diamond and the last  
 And largest, Arthur, holding then his court  
 Hard on the river nigh the place which now  
 Is this world's hugest, let proclaim a joust  
 At Camelot, and when the time drew nigh  
 Spake (for she had been sick) to Guinevere,  
 'Are you so sick, my Queen, you cannot move  
 To these fair jousts?' 'Yea, lord,' she said, 'ye know  
 it.' 80

'Then will ye miss,' he answer'd, 'the great deeds  
 Of Lancelot, and his prowess in the lists,  
 A sight ye love to look on.' And the Queen  
 Lifted her eyes, and they dwelt languidly  
 On Lancelot, where he stood beside the King.  
 He thinking that he read her meaning there,  
 'Stay with me, I am sick ; my love is more  
 Than many diamonds,' yielded ; and a heart  
 Love-loyal to the least wish of the Queen  
 (However much he yearn'd to make complete 90  
 The tale of diamonds for his destined boon)

Urged him to speak against the truth, and say,  
'Sir King, mine ancient wound is hardly whole,  
And lets me from the saddle;' and the King  
Glanced first at him, then her, and went his way.  
No sooner gone than suddenly she began :

'To blame, my lord Sir Lancelot, much to blame !  
Why go ye not to these fair jousts? the knights  
Are half of them our enemies, and the crowd  
Will murmur, "Lo the shameless ones, who take 100  
Their pastime now the trustful King is gone!"'  
Then Lancelot vext at having lied in vain :  
'Are ye so wise? ye were not once so wise,  
My Queen, that summer, when ye loved me first.  
Then of the crowd ye took no more account  
Than of the myriad cricket of the mead,  
When its own voice clings to each blade of grass,  
And every voice is nothing. As to knights,  
Them surely can I silence with all ease.  
But now my loyal worship is allow'd 110  
Of all men : many a bard, without offence,  
Has link'd our names together in his lay,  
Lancelot, the flower of bravery, Guinevere,  
The pearl of beauty : and our knights at feast  
Have pledged us in this union, while the King  
Would listen smiling. How then? is there more?  
Has Arthур spoken aught? or would yourself,  
Now weary of my service and devoir,  
Henceforth be truer to your faultless lord ?'

She broke into a little scornful laugh : 120  
'Arthur, my lord, Arthur, the faultless King,  
That passionate perfection, my good lord—  
But who can gaze upon the Sun in heaven?  
He never spake word of reproach to me,  
He never had a glimpse of mine untruth,

He cares not for me : only here to-day  
There gleam'd a vague suspicion in his eyes :  
Some meddling rogue has tamper'd with him—else  
Rapt in this fancy of his Table Round,  
And swearing men to vows impossible, 130  
To make them like himself : but, friend, to me  
He is all fault who hath no fault at all :  
For who loves me must have a touch of earth ;  
The low sun makes the colour : I am yours,  
Not Arthur's, as ye know, save by the bond.  
And therefore hear my words : go to the jousts :  
The tiny-trumpeting gnat can break our dream  
When sweetest ; and the vermin voices here  
May buzz so loud—we scorn them, but they sting.'

Then answer'd Lancelot, the chief of knights : 140  
'And with what face, after my pretext made,  
Shall I appear, O Queen, at Camelot, I  
Before a King who honours his own word,  
As if it were his God's?'

'Yea,' said the Queen,  
'A moral child without the craft to rule,  
Else had he not lost me : but listen to me,  
If I must find you wit : we hear it said  
That men go down before your spear at a touch,  
But knowing you are Lancelot ; your great name,  
This conquers : hide it therefore ; go unknown : 150  
Win ! by this kiss you will : and our true King  
Will then allow your pretext, O my knight,  
As all for glory ; for to speak him true,  
Ye know right well, how meek soe'er he seem,  
No keener hunter after glory breathes.  
He loves it in his knights more than himself :  
They prove to him his work : win and return.'



Then got Sir Lancelot suddenly to horse,  
Wroth at himself. Not willing to be known,  
He left the barren-beaten thoroughfare, 160  
Chose the green path that show'd the rarer foot,  
And there among the solitary downs,  
Full often lost in fancy, lost his way ;  
Till as he traced a faintly-shadow'd track,  
That all in loops and links among the dales  
Ran to the Castle of Astolat, he saw  
Fired from the west, far on a hill, the towers.  
Thither he made, and blew the gateway horn.  
Then came an old, dumb, myriad-wrinkled man,  
Who let him into lodging and disarm'd. 170  
And Lancelot marvell'd at the wordless man ;  
And issuing found the Lord of Astolat  
With two strong sons, Sir Torre and Sir Lavaine,  
Moving to meet him in the castle court ;  
And close behind them stept the lily maid  
Elaine, his daughter : mother of the house  
There was not : some light jest among them rose  
With laughter dying down as the great knight  
Approach'd them : then the Lord of Astolat :  
' Whence comest thou, my guest, and by what name  
Livest between the lips ? for by thy state 181  
And presence I might guess thee chief of those,  
After the King, who eat in Arthur's halls.  
Him have I seen : the rest, his Table Round,  
Known as they are, to me they are unknown.'

Then answer'd Lancelot, the chief of knights :  
' Known am I, and of Arthur's hall, and known,  
What I by mere mischance have brought, my shield.  
But since I go to joust as one unknown  
At Camelot for the diamond, ask me not, 190  
Hereafter ye shall know me—and the shield—

I pray you lend me one, if such you have,  
Blank, or at least with some device not mine.'

Then said the Lord of Astolat, 'Here is Torre's:  
Hurt in his first tilt was my son, Sir Torre.  
And so, God wot, his shield is blank enough.  
His ye can have.' Then added plain Sir Torre,  
'Yea, since I cannot use it, ye may have it.'  
Here laugh'd the father saying, 'Fie, Sir Churl,  
Is that an answer for a noble knight? 200  
Allow him! but Lavaine, my younger here,  
He is so full of lustihood, he will ride,  
Joust for it, and win, and bring it in an hour,  
And set it in this damsel's golden hair,  
To make her thrice as wilful as before.'

'Nay, father, nay good father, shame me not  
Before this noble knight,' said young Lavaine,  
'For nothing. Surely I but play'd on Torre:  
He seem'd so sullen, vext he could not go:  
A jest, no more! for, knight, the maiden dreamt 210  
That some one put this diamond in her hand,  
And that it was too slippery to be held,  
And slipt and fell into some pool or stream,  
The castle-well, belike; and then I said  
That *if* I went and *if* I fought and won it  
(But all was jest and joke among ourselves)  
Then must she keep it safelier. All was jest.  
But, father, give me leave, an if he will,  
To ride to Camelot with this noble knight:  
Win shall I not, but do my best to win: 220  
Young as I am, yet would I do my best.'

'So ye will grace me,' answer'd Lancelot,  
Smiling a moment, 'with your fellowship  
O'er these waste downs whereon I lost myself,

Then were I glad of you as guide and friend :  
And you shall win this diamond,—as I hear  
It is a fair large diamond,—if ye may,  
And yield it to this maiden, if ye will.’  
‘A fair large diamond,’ added plain Sir Torre,  
‘Such be for queens, and not for simple maids.’ 230  
Then she, who held her eyes upon the ground,  
Elaine, and heard her name so tost about,  
Flush’d slightly at the slight disparagement  
Before the stranger knight, who, looking at her,  
Full courtly, yet not falsely, thus return’d :  
‘If what is fair be but for what is fair,  
And only queens are to be counted so,  
Rash were my judgment then, who deem this maid  
Might wear as fair a jewel as is on earth,  
Not violating the bond of like to like.’ 240

He spoke and ceased : the lily maid Elaine,  
Won by the mellow voice before she look’d,  
Lifted her eyes, and read his lineaments.  
The great and guilty love he bare the Queen,  
In battle with the love he bare his lord,  
Had marr’d his face, and mark’d it ere his time.  
Another sinning on such heights with one,  
The flower of all the west and all the world,  
Had been the sleeker for it : but in him  
His mood was often like a fiend, and rose 250  
And drove him into wastes and solitudes  
For agony, who was yet a living soul.  
Marr’d as he was, he seem’d the goodliest man  
That ever among ladies ate in hall,  
And noblest, when she lifted up her eyes.  
However marr’d, of more than twice her years,  
Seam’d with an ancient swordcut on the cheek,  
And bruised and bronzed, she lifted up her eyes  
And loved him, with that love which was her doom.

Then the great knight, the darling of the court, 260  
Loved of the loveliest, into that rude hall  
Stept with all grace, and not with half disdain  
Hid under grace, as in a smaller time,  
But kindly man moving among his kind :  
Whom they with meats and vintage of their best  
And talk and minstrel melody entertain'd.  
And much they ask'd of court and Table Round,  
And ever well and readily answer'd he :  
But Lancelot, when they glanced at Guinevere,  
Suddenly speaking of the wordless man, 270  
Heard from the Baron that, ten years before,  
The heathen caught and reft him of his tongue.  
'He learnt and warn'd me of their fierce design  
Against my house, and him they caught and maim'd ;  
But I, my sons, and little daughter fled  
From bonds or death, and dwelt among the woods  
By the great river in a boatman's hut.  
Dull days were those, till our good Arthur broke  
The Pagan yet once more on Badon hill.'

'O there, great lord, doubtless,' Lavaine said, rapt  
By all the sweet and sudden passion of youth 281  
Toward greatness in its elder, 'you have fought.  
O tell us—for we live apart—you know  
Of Arthur's glorious wars.' And Lancelot spoke  
And answer'd him at full, as having been  
With Arthur in the fight which all day long  
Rang by the white mouth of the violent Glem ;  
And in the four loud battles by the shore  
Of Duglas ; that on Bassa ; then the war  
That thunder'd in and out the gloomy skirts 290  
Of Celidon the forest ; and again  
By castle Gurnion, where the glorious King  
Had on his cuirass worn our Lady's Head,  
Carved of one emerald center'd in a sun

Of silver rays, that lighten'd as he breathed ;  
And at Caerleon had he help'd his lord,  
When the strong neighings of the wild white Horse  
Set every gilded parapet shuddering ;  
And up in Agned-Cathregonion too,  
And down the waste sand-shores of Trath Treroit, 300  
Where many a heathen fell ; 'and on the mount  
Of Badon I myself beheld the King  
Charge at the head of all his Table Round,  
And all his legions crying Christ and him,  
And break them ; and I saw him, after, stand  
High on a heap of slain, from spur to plume  
Red as the rising sun with heathen blood,  
And seeing me, with a great voice he cried,  
"They are broken, they are broken !" for the King,  
However mild he seems at home, nor cares 310  
For triumph in our mimic wars, the jousts—  
For if his own knight cast him down, he laughs  
Saying, his knights are better men than he—  
Yet in this heathen war the fire of God  
Fills him : I never saw his like : there lives  
No greater leader.'

While he utter'd this,  
Low to her own heart said the lily maid,  
'Save your great self, fair lord ;' and when he fell  
From talk of war to traits of pleasantry—  
Being mirthful he, but in a stately kind— 320  
She still took note that when the living smile  
Died from his lips, across him came a cloud  
Of melancholy severe, from which again,  
Whenever in her hovering to and fro  
The lily maid had striven to make him cheer,  
There brake a sudden-beaming tenderness  
Of manners and of nature : and she thought  
That all was nature, all, perchance, for her.

And all night long his face before her lived,  
As when a painter, poring on a face, 330  
Divinely thro' all hindrance finds the man  
Behind it, and so paints him that his face,  
The shape and colour of a mind and life,  
Lives for his children, ever at its best  
And fullest; so the face before her lived,  
Dark-splendid, speaking in the silence, full  
Of noble things, and held her from her sleep.  
Till rathe she rose, half-cheated in the thought  
She needs must bid farewell to sweet Lavaine.  
First as in fear, step after step, she stole 340  
Down the long tower-stairs, hesitating:  
Anon, she heard Sir Lancelot cry in the court,  
'This shield, my friend, where is it?' and Lavaine  
Past inward, as she came from out the tower.  
There to his proud horse Lancelot turn'd, and smooth'd  
The glossy shoulder, humming to himself.  
Half-envious of the flattering hand, she drew  
Nearer and stood. He look'd, and more amazed  
Than if seven men had set upon him, saw  
The maiden standing in the dewy light. 350  
He had not dream'd she was so beautiful.  
Then came on him a sort of sacred fear.  
For silent, tho' he greeted her, she stood  
Rapt on his face as if it were a God's.  
Suddenly flash'd on her a wild desire,  
That he should wear her favour at the tilt.  
She braved a riotous heart in asking for it.  
'Fair lord, whose name I know not—noble it is,  
I well believe, the noblest—will you wear  
My favour at this tourney?' 'Nay,' said he, 360  
'Fair lady, since I never yet have worn  
Favour of any lady in the lists.  
Such is my wont, as those, who know me, know.'  
'Yea, so,' she answer'd; 'then in wearing mine

Needs must be lesser likelihood, noble lord,  
That those who know should know you.' And he turn'd  
Her counsel up and down within his mind,  
And found it true, and answer'd, 'True, my child.  
Well, I will wear it: fetch it out to me:  
What is it?' and she told him 'A red sleeve 370  
Broider'd with pearls,' and brought it: then he bound  
Her token on his helmet, with a smile  
Saying, 'I never yet have done so much  
For any maiden living,' and the blood  
Sprang to her face and fill'd her with delight;  
But left her all the paler, when Lavaine  
Returning brought the yet-unblazon'd shield,  
His brother's; which he gave to Lancelot,  
Who parted with his own to fair Elaine:  
'Do me this grace, my child, to have my shield 380  
In keeping till I come.' 'A grace to me,'  
She answer'd, 'twice to-day. I am your squire!'  
Whereat Lavaine said, laughing, 'Lily maid,  
For fear our people call you lily maid  
In earnest, let me bring your colour back;  
Once, twice, and thrice: now get you hence to bed.'  
So kiss'd her, and Sir Lancelot his own hand,  
And thus they moved away: she stay'd a minute,  
Then made a sudden step to the gate, and there—  
Her bright hair blown about the serious face 390  
Yet rosy-kindled with her brother's kiss—  
Paused by the gateway, standing near the shield  
In silence, while she watch'd their arms far-off  
Sparkle, until they dipt below the downs.  
Then to her tower she climb'd, and took the shield,  
There kept it, and so lived in fantasy.

Meanwhile the new companions past away  
Far o'er the long backs of the bushless downs,  
To where Sir Lancelot knew there lived a knight

Not far from Camelot, now for forty years      400  
A hermit, who had pray'd, labour'd and pray'd,  
And ever labouring had scoop'd himself  
In the white rock a chapel and a hall  
On massive columns, like a shorecliff cave,  
And cells and chambers: all were fair and dry;  
The green light from the meadows underneath  
Struck up and lived along the milky roofs;  
And in the meadows tremulous aspen-trees  
And poplars made a noise of falling showers.  
And thither wending there that night they bode. 410

But when the next day broke from underground,  
And shot red fire and shadows thro' the cave,  
They rose, heard mass, broke fast, and rode away:  
Then Lancelot saying, 'Hear, but hold my name  
Hidden, you ride with Lancelot of the Lake,'  
Abash'd Lavaine, whose instant reverence,  
Dearer to true young hearts than their own praise,  
But left him leave to stammer, 'Is it indeed?'  
And after muttering 'The great Lancelot,'  
At last he got his breath and answer'd, 'One,      420  
One have I seen—that other, our liege lord,  
The dread Pendragon, Britain's King of kings,  
Of whom the people talk mysteriously,  
He will be there—then were I stricken blind  
That minute, I might say that I had seen.'

So spake Lavaine, and when they reach'd the lists  
By Camelot in the meadow, let his eyes  
Run thro' the peopled gallery which half round  
Lay like a rainbow fall'n upon the grass,  
Until they found the clear-faced King, who sat      430  
Robed in red samite, easily to be known,  
Since to his crown the golden dragon clung,  
And down his robe the dragon writhed in gold,



And from the carven-work behind him crept  
Two dragons gilded, sloping down to make  
Arms for his chair, while all the rest of them  
Thro' knots and loops and folds innumerable  
Fled ever thro' the woodwork, till they found  
The new design wherein they lost themselves,  
Yet with all ease, so tender was the work : 440  
And, in the costly canopy o'er him set,  
Blazed the last diamond of the nameless king.

Then Lancelot answer'd young Lavaine and said,  
'Me you call great : mine is the firmer seat,  
The truer lance : but there is many a youth  
Now crescent, who will come to all I am  
And overcome it ; and in me there dwells  
No greatness, save it be some far-off touch  
Of greatness to know well I am not great :  
There is the man.' And Lavaine gaped upon him  
As on a thing miraculous, and anon 451  
The trumpets blew ; and then did either side,  
They that assail'd, and they that held the lists,  
Set lance in rest, strike spur, suddenly move,  
Meet in the midst, and there so furiously  
Shock, that a man far-off might well perceive,  
If any man that day were left afield,  
The hard earth shake, and a low thunder of arms.  
And Lancelot bode a little, till he saw  
Which were the weaker ; then he hurl'd into it 460  
Against the stronger : little need to speak  
Of Lancelot in his glory ! King, duke, earl,  
Count, baron—whom he smote, he overthrew.

But in the field where Lancelot's kith and kin,  
Ranged with the Table Round that held the lists,  
Strong men, and wrathful that a stranger knight  
Should do and almost overdo the deeds

Of Lancelot; and one said to the other, 'Lo!  
 What is he? I do not mean the force alone—  
 The grace and versatility of the man! 470  
 Is it not Lancelot?' 'When has Lancelot worn  
 Favour of any lady in the lists?  
 Not such his wont, as we, that know him, know.'  
 'How then? who then?' a fury seized them all,  
 A fiery family passion for the name  
 Of Lancelot, and a glory one with theirs.  
 They couch'd their spears and prick'd their steeds, and  
 thus,  
 Their plumes driv'n backward by the wind they made  
 In moving, all together down upon him  
 Bare, as a wild wave in the wide North-sea, 480  
 Green-glimmering toward the summit, bears, with all  
 Its stormy crests that smoke against the skies,  
 Down on a bark, and overbears the bark,  
 And him that helms it, so they overbore  
 Sir Lancelot and his charger, and a spear  
 Down-glancing lamed the charger, and a spear  
 Prick'd sharply his own cuirass, and the head  
 Pierced thro' his side, and there snapt, and remain'd.

Then Sir Lavaine did well and worshipfully;  
 He bore a knight of old repute to the earth, 490  
 And brought his horse to Lancelot where he lay.  
 He up the side, sweating with agony, got,  
 But thought to do while he might yet endure,  
 And being lustily holpen by the rest,  
 His party,—tho' it seem'd half-miracle  
 To those he fought with,—drave his kith and kin,  
 And all the Table Round that held the lists,  
 Back to the barrier; then the trumpets blew  
 Proclaiming his the prize, who wore the sleeve  
 Of scarlet, and the pearls; and all the knights, 500  
 His party, cried 'Advance and take thy prize

The diamond ;' but he answer'd, 'Diamond me  
No diamonds ! for God's love, a little air !  
Prize me no prizes, for my prize is death !  
Hence will I, and I charge you, follow me not.'

He spoke, and vanish'd suddenly from the field  
With young Lavaine into the poplar grove.  
There from his charger down he slid, and sat,  
Gasping to Sir Lavaine, 'Draw the lance-head :  
'Ah my sweet Lord Sir Lancelot,' said Lavaine, 510  
'I dread me, if I draw it, you will die.'  
But he, 'I die already with it : draw—  
Draw,'—and Lavaine drew, and Sir Lancelot gave  
A marvellous great shriek and ghastly groan,  
And half his blood burst forth, and down he sank  
For the pure pain, and wholly swoon'd away.  
Then came the hermit out and bare him in,  
There stanch'd his wound ; and there, in daily doubt  
Whether to live or die, for many a week  
Hid from the wide world's rumour by the grove 520  
Of poplars with their noise of falling showers,  
And ever-tremulous aspen-trees, he lay.

But on that day when Lancelot fled the lists,  
His party, knights of utmost North and West,  
Lords of waste marches, kings of desolate isles,  
Came round their great Pendragon, saying to him,  
'Lo, Sire, our knight, thro' whom we won the day,  
Hath gone sore wounded, and hath left his prize  
Untaken, crying that his prize is death.'  
'Heaven hinder,' said the King, 'that such an one, 530  
So great a knight as we have seen to-day—  
He seem'd to me another Lancelot—  
Yea, twenty times I thought him Lancelot—  
He must not pass uncared for. Wherefore, rise,  
O Gawain, and ride forth and find the knight.

Wounded and wearied needs must he be near.  
I charge you that you get at once to horse.  
And, knights and kings, there breathes not one of  
you

Will deem this prize of ours is rashly given :  
His prowess was too wondrous. We will do him 540  
No customary honour : since the knight  
Came not to us, of us to claim the prize,  
Ourselves will send it after. Rise and take  
This diamond, and deliver it, and return,  
And bring us where he is, and how he fares,  
And cease not from your quest until ye find.'

So saying, from the carven flower above,  
To which it made a restless heart, he took,  
And gave, the diamond : then from where he sat . . .  
At Arthur's right, with smiling face arose, 550  
With smiling face and frowning heart, a Prince  
In the mid might and flourish of his May,  
Gawain, surnamed The Courteous, fair and strong,  
And after Lancelot, Tristram, and Geraint  
And Gareth, a good knight, but therewithal  
Sir Mordred's brother, and the child of Lot,  
Nor often loyal to his word, and now  
Wroth that the King's command to sally forth  
In quest of whom he knew not, made him leave  
The banquet, and concourse of knights and kings.

So all in wrath he got to horse and went ; 561  
While Arthur to the banquet, dark in mood,  
Past, thinking 'Is it Lancelot who hath come  
Despite the wound he spake of, all for gain  
Of glory, and hath added wound to wound,  
And ridd'n away to die?' So fear'd the King,  
And, after two days' tarriance there, return'd.  
Then when he saw the Queen, embracing ask'd,

'Love, are you yet so sick?' 'Nay, lord,' she said,  
'And where is Lancelot?' Then the Queen amazed,  
'Was he not with you? -won he not your prize?' 571  
'Nay, but one like him.' 'Why that like was he.'  
And when the King demanded how she knew,  
Said, 'Lord, no sooner had ye parted from us,  
Than Lancelot told me of a common talk  
That men went down before his spear at a touch,  
But knowing he was Lancelot; his great name  
Conquer'd; and therefore would he hide his name  
From all men, ev'n the King, and to this end  
Had made the pretext of a hindering wound, 580  
That he might joust unknown of all, and learn  
If his old prowess were in aught decay'd;  
And added, "Our true Arthur, when he learns,  
Will well allow my pretext, as for gain  
Of purer glory."'

Then replied the King:  
'Far lovelier in our Lancelot had it been,  
In lieu of idly dallying with the truth,  
To have trusted me as he hath trusted thee.  
Surely his King and most familiar friend  
Might well have kept his secret. True, indeed, 590  
Albeit I know my knights fantastical,  
So fine a fear in our large Lancelot  
Must needs have moved my laughter: now remains  
But little cause for laughter: his own kin—  
Ill news, my Queen, for all who love him, this!—  
His kith and kin, not knowing, set upon him;  
So that he went sore wounded from the field:  
Yet good news too: for goodly hopes are mine  
That Lancelot is no more a lonely heart.  
He wore, against his wont, upon his helm 600  
A sleeve of scarlet, broider'd with great pearls,  
Some gentle maiden's gift.'

‘Yea, lord,’ she said,  
‘Thy hopes are mine,’ and saying that, she choked,  
And sharply turn’d about to hide her face,  
Past to her chamber, and there flung herself  
Down on the great King’s couch, and writhed upon it,  
And clench’d her fingers till they bit the palm,  
And shriek’d out ‘Traitor’ to the unhearing wall,  
Then flash’d into wild tears, and rose again,  
And moved about her palace, proud and pale. 610

Gawain the while thro’ all the region round  
Rode with his diamond, wearied of the quest,  
Touch’d at all points, except the poplar grove,  
And came at last, tho’ late, to Astolat :  
Whom glittering in enamell’d arms the maid  
Glanced at, and cried, ‘What news from Camelot, Lord ?  
What of the knight with the red sleeve ?’ ‘He won.’  
‘I knew it,’ she said. ‘But parted from the jousts  
Hurt in the side,’ whereat she caught her breath ;  
Thro’ her own side she felt the sharp lance go : 620  
Thereon she smote her hand : wellnigh she swoon’d :  
And, while he gazed wonderingly at her, came  
The Lord of Astolat out, to whom the Prince  
Reported who he was, and on what quest  
Sent, that he bore the prize and could not find  
The victor, but had ridd’n a random round  
To seek him, and had wearied of the search,  
To whom the Lord of Astolat, ‘Bide with us,  
And ride no more at random, noble Prince !  
Here was the knight, and here he left a shield ; 630  
This will he send or come for : furthermore  
Our son is with him ; we shall hear anon,  
Needs must we hear.’ To this the courteous Prince  
Accorded with his wonted courtesy,  
Courtesy with a touch of traitor in it,  
And stay’d ; and cast his eyes on fair Elaine :

Where could be found face daintier? then her shape  
From forehead down to foot, perfect—again  
From foot to forehead exquisitely turn'd:

'Well—if I bide, lo! this wild flower for me!' 640

And oft they met among the garden yews,  
And there he set himself to play upon her  
With sallying wit, free flashes from a height  
Above her, graces of the court, and songs,  
Sighs, and slow smiles, and golden eloquence  
And amorous adulation, till the maid  
Rebell'd against it, saying to him, 'Prince,  
O loyal nephew of our noble King,  
Why ask you not to see the shield he left,  
Whence you might learn his name? Why slight your  
King, 650

And lose the quest he sent you on, and prove  
No surer than our falcon yesterday,  
Who lost the hern we slipt her at, and went  
To all the winds?' 'Nay, by mine head,' said he,  
'I lose it, as we lose the lark in heaven,  
O damsel, in the light of your blue eyes;  
But an ye will it let me see the shield.'

And when the shield was brought, and Gawain saw  
Sir Lancelot's azure lions, crown'd with gold, 659

Ramp in the field, he smote his thigh, and mock'd:

'Right was the King! our Lancelot! that true man!'

'And right was I,' she answer'd merrily, 'I,

Who dream'd my knight the greatest knight of all.'

'And if *I* dream'd,' said Gawain, 'that you love

This greatest knight, your pardon! lo, ye know it!

Speak therefore: shall I waste myself in vain?'

Full simple was her answer, 'What know I?

My brethren have been all my fellowship;

And I, when often they have talk'd of love,

Wish'd it had been my mother, for they talk'd, 670

Meseem'd, of what they knew not; so myself—

I know not if I know what true love is,  
 But if I know, then, if I love not him,  
 I know there is none other I can love.  
 'Yea, by God's death,' said he, 'ye love him well,  
 But would not, knew ye what all others know,  
 And whom he loves.' 'So be it,' cried Elaine,  
 And lifted her fair face and moved away :  
 But he pursued her, calling, 'Stay a little !  
 One golden minute's grace ! he wore your sleeve : 680  
 Would he break faith with one I may not name ?  
 Must our true man change like a leaf at last ?  
 Nay—like enow : why then, far be it from me  
 To cross our mighty Lancelot in his loves !  
 And, damsel, for I deem you know full well  
 Where your great knight is hidden, let me leave  
 My quest with you ; the diamond also : here !  
 For if you love, it will be sweet to give it ;  
 And if he love, it will be sweet to have it  
 From your own hand ; and whether he love or not,  
 A diamond is a diamond. Fare you well 691  
 A thousand times !—a thousand times farewell !  
 Yet, if he love, and his love hold, we two  
 May meet at court hereafter : there, I think,  
 So ye will learn the courtesies of the court,  
 We two shall know each other.'

Then he gave,  
 And slightly kiss'd the hand to which he gave,  
 The diamond, and all wearied of the quest  
 Leapt on his horse, and carolling as he went  
 A true-love ballad, lightly rode away. 700

Thence to the court he past ; there told the King  
 What the King knew, 'Sir Lancelot is the knight.'  
 And added, 'Sire, my liege, so much I learnt ;  
 But fail'd to find him, tho' I rode all round  
 The region : but I lighted on the maid



Whose sleeve he wore; she loves him; and to her,  
Deeming our courtesy is the truest law,  
I gave the diamond: she will render it;  
For by mine head she knows his hiding-place.'

The seldom-frowning King frown'd, and replied,  
'Too courteous truly! ye shall go no more 711  
On quest of mine, seeing that ye forget  
Obedience is the courtesy due to kings.'

He spake and parted. Wroth, but all in awe,  
For twenty strokes of the blood, without a word,  
Linger'd that other, staring after him;  
Then shook his hair, strode off, and buzz'd abroad  
About the maid of Astolat, and her love.  
All ears were prick'd at once, all tongues were loosed:  
'The maid of Astolat loves Sir Lancelot, 720  
Sir Lancelot loves the maid of Astolat.'  
Some read the King's face, some the Queen's, and all  
Had marvel what the maid might be, but most  
Predoom'd her as unworthy. One old dame  
Came suddenly on the Queen with the sharp news.  
She, that had heard the noise of it before,  
But sorrowing Lancelot should have stoop'd so low,  
Marr'd her friend's aim with pale tranquillity.  
So ran the tale like fire about the court,  
Fire in dry stubble a nine-days' wonder flared: 730  
Till ev'n the knights at banquet twice or thrice  
Forgot to drink to Lancelot and the Queen,  
And pledging Lancelot and the lily maid  
Smiled at each other, while the Queen, who sat  
With lips severely placid, felt the knot  
Climb in her throat, and with her feet unseen  
Crush'd the wild passion out against the floor.  
Beneath the banquet, where the meats became  
As wormwood, and she hated all who pledged.

But far away the maid in Astolat, 740  
Her guiltless rival, she that ever kept  
The one-day-seen Sir Lancelot in her heart,  
Crept to her father, while he mused alone,  
Sat on his knee, stroked his gray face and said,  
'Father, you call me wilful, and the fault  
Is yours who let me have my will, and now,  
Sweet father, will you let me lose my wits?'  
'Nay,' said he, 'surely.' 'Wherefore, let me hence,'  
She answer'd, 'and find out our dear Lavaine.'  
'Ye will not lose your wits for dear Lavaine: 750  
Bide,' answer'd he: 'we needs must hear anon  
Of him, and of that other.' 'Ay,' she said,  
'And of that other, for I needs must hence  
And find that other, wheresoe'er he be,  
And with mine own hand give his diamond to him,  
Lest I be found as faithless in the quest  
As yon proud Prince who left the quest to me.  
Sweet father, I behold him in my dreams  
Gaunt as it were the skeleton of himself,  
Death-pale, for lack of gentle maiden's aid. 760  
The gentler-born the maiden, the more bound,  
My father, to be sweet and serviceable  
To noble knights in sickness, as ye know  
When these have worn their tokens: let me hence  
I pray you.' Then her father nodding said,  
'Ay, ay, the diamond: wit ye well, my child,  
Right fain were I to learn this knight were whole,  
Being our greatest: yea, and you must give it—  
And sure I think this fruit is hung too high  
For any mouth to gape for save a queen's— 770  
Nay, I mean nothing: so then, get you gone,  
Being so very wilful you must go.'

Lightly, her suit allow'd, she slipt away,  
And while she made her ready for her ride,

Her father's latest word humm'd in her ear,  
'Being so very wilful you must go,'  
And changed itself and echo'd in her heart,  
'Being so very wilful you must die.'  
But she was happy enough and shook it off,  
As we shake off the bee that buzzes at us ; 780  
And in her heart she answer'd it and said,  
'What matter, so I help him back to life?  
Then far away with good Sir Torre for guide  
Rode o'er the long backs of the bushless downs  
To Camelot, and before the city-gates  
Came on her brother with a happy face  
Making a roan horse caper and curvet  
For pleasure all about a field of flowers :  
Whom when she saw, 'Lavaine,' she cried, 'Lavaine,  
How fares my lord Sir Lancelot?' He amazed, 790  
'Torre and Elaine ! why here ? Sir Lancelot !  
How know ye my lord's name is Lancelot ?'  
But when the maid had told him all her tale,  
Then turn'd Sir Torre, and being in his moods  
Left them, and under the strange-statued gate,  
Where Arthur's wars were render'd mystically,  
Past up the still rich city to his kin,  
His own far blood, which dwelt at Camelot ;  
And her, Lavaine across the poplar grove  
Led to the caves : there first she saw the casque 800  
Of Lancelot on the wall : her scarlet sleeve,  
Tho' carved and cut, and half the pearls away,  
Stream'd from it still ; and in her heart she laugh'd,  
Because he had not loosed it from his helm,  
But meant once more perchance to tourney in it.  
And when they gain'd the cell wherein he slept,  
His battle-writhen arms and mighty hands  
Lay naked on the wolfskin, and a dream  
Of dragging down his enemy made them move.  
Then she that saw him lying unsleek, unshorn, 810

Gaunt as it were the skeleton of himself,  
Utter'd a little tender dolorous cry.  
The sound not wonted in a place so still  
Woke the sick knight, and while he roll'd his eyes  
Yet blank from sleep, she started to him, saying,  
'Your prize the diamond sent you by the King :'  
His eyes glisten'd : she fancied 'Is it for me ?'  
And when the maid had told him all the tale  
Of King and Prince, the diamond sent, the quest  
Assign'd to her not worthy of it, she knelt 820  
Full lowly by the corners of his bed,  
And laid the diamond in his open hand.  
Her face was near, and as we kiss the child  
That does the task assign'd, he kiss'd her face.  
At once she slipt like water to the floor.  
'Alas,' he said, 'your ride hath wearied you.  
Rest must you have.' 'No rest for me,' she said ;  
'Nay, for near you, fair lord, I am at rest.'  
What might she mean by that ? his large black eyes,  
Yet larger thro' his leanness, dwelt upon her, 830  
Till all her heart's sad secret blazed itself  
In the heart's colours on her simple face ;  
And Lancelot look'd and was perplexed in mind,  
And being weak in body said no more ;  
But did not love the colour ; woman's love,  
Save one, he not regarded, and so turn'd  
Sighing, and feign'd a sleep until he slept.

Then rose Elaine and glided thro' the fields,  
And past beneath the weirdly-sculptured gates  
Far up the dim rich city to her kin ; 840  
There bode the night : but woke with dawn, and  
past  
Down thro' the dim rich city to the fields,  
Thence to the cave : so day by day she past  
In either twilight ghost-like to and fro

Gliding, and every day she tended him,  
And likewise many a night : and Lancelot  
Would, tho' he call'd his wound a little hurt  
Whereof he should be quickly whole, at times  
Brain-feverous in his heat and agony, seem  
Uncourteous, even he : but the meek maid 850  
Sweetly forbore him ever, being to him  
Meeker than any child to a rough nurse,  
Milder than any mother to a sick child,  
And never woman yet, since man's first fall,  
Did kindlier unto man, but her deep love  
Upbore her ; till the hermit, skill'd in all  
The simples and the science of that time,  
Told him that her fine care had saved his life.  
And the sick man forgot her simple blush,  
Would call her friend and sister, sweet Elaine, 860  
Would listen for her coming and regret  
Her parting step, and held her tenderly,  
And loved her with all love except the love  
Of man and woman when they love their best,  
Closest and sweetest, and had died the death  
In any knightly fashion for her sake.  
And peradventure had he seen her first  
She might have made this and that other world  
Another world for the sick man ; but now  
The shackles of an old love straiten'd him, 870  
His honour rooted in dishonour stood,  
And faith unfaithful kept him falsely true.

Yet the great knight in his mid-sickness made  
Full many a holy vow and pure resolve.  
These, as but born of sickness, could not live :  
For when the blood ran lustier in him again,  
Full often the bright image of one face,  
Making a treacherous quiet in his heart,  
Dispersed his resolution like a cloud.

Then if the maiden, while that ghostly grace      880  
Beam'd on his fancy, spoke, he answer'd not,  
Or short and coldly, and she knew right well  
What the rough sickness meant, but what this meant  
She knew not, and the sorrow dimm'd her sight,  
And drave her e'er her time across the fields  
Far into the rich city, where alone  
She murmur'd, 'Vain, in vain : it cannot be.  
He will not love me : how then ? must I die ?'  
Then as a little helpless innocent bird,  
That has but one plain passage of few notes,      890  
Will sing the simple passage o'er and o'er  
For all an April morning, till the ear  
Wearies to hear it, so the simple maid  
Went half the night repeating, 'Must I die ?'  
And now to right she turn'd, and now to left,  
And found no ease in turning or in rest ;  
And 'Him or death,' she mutter'd, 'death or him,'  
Again and like a burthen, 'Him or death.'

But when Sir Lancelot's deadly hurt was whole,  
To Astolat returning rode the three.      900  
There morn by morn, arraying her sweet self  
In that wherein she deem'd she look'd her best,  
She came before Sir Lancelot, for she thought  
'If I be loved, these are my festal robes,  
If not, the victim's flowers before he fall.'  
And Lancelot ever prest upon the maid  
That she should ask some goodly gift of him  
For her own self or hers ; 'and do not shun  
To speak the wish most near to your true heart ;  
Such service have ye done me, that I make      910  
My will of yours, and Prince and Lord am I  
In mine own land, and what I will I can.'  
Then like a ghost she lifted up her face,  
But like a ghost without the power to speak.

And Lancelot saw that she withheld her wish,  
And bode among them yet a little space  
Till he should learn it; and one morn it chanced  
He found her in among the garden yews,  
And said, 'Delay no longer, speak your wish,  
Seeing I go to-day : ' then out she brake : 920  
'Going? and we shall never see you more.  
And I must die for want of one bold word.'  
'Speak: that I live to hear,' he said, 'is yours.'  
Then suddenly and passionately she spoke :  
'I have gone mad. I love you: let me die.'  
'Ah, sister,' answer'd Lancelot, 'what is this ?'  
And innocently extending her white arms,  
'Your love,' she said 'your love—to be your wife.'  
And Lancelot answer'd, 'Had I chosen to wed,  
I had been wedded earlier, sweet Elaine : 930  
But now there never will be wife of mine.'  
'No, no,' she cried, 'I care not to be wife,  
But to be with you still, to see your face,  
To serve you, and to follow you thro' the world.'  
And Lancelot answer'd, 'Nay, the world, the world,  
All ear and eye, with such a stupid heart  
To interpret ear and eye, and such a tongue  
To blare its own interpretation—nay,  
Full ill then should I quit your brother's love,  
And your good father's kindness.' And she said, 940  
'Not to be with you, not to see your face—  
Alas for me then, my good days are done.'  
'Nay, noble maid,' he answer'd, 'ten times nay !  
This is not love: but love's first flash in youth,  
Most common: yea, I know it of mine own self:  
And you yourself will smile at your own self  
Hereafter, when you yield your flower of life  
To one more fitly yours, not thrice your age:  
And then will I, for true you are and sweet  
Beyond mine old belief in womanhood, 950

More specially should your good knight be poor,  
Endow you with broad land and territory  
Even to the half my realm beyond the seas,  
So that would make you happy : furthermore,  
Ev'n to the death, as tho' ye were my blood,  
In all your quarrels will I be your knight.  
This will I do, dear damsel, for your sake,  
And more than this I cannot.'

While he spoke  
She neither blush'd nor shook, but deathly-pale  
Stood grasping what was nearest, then replied : 960  
'Of all this will I nothing ;' and so fell,  
And thus they bore her swooning to her tower.

Then spake, to whom thro' those black walls of yew  
Their talk had pierced, her father : Ay, a flash,  
I fear me, that will strike my blossom dead.  
Too courteous are ye, fair Lord Lancelot.  
I pray you, use some rough discourtesy  
To blunt or break her passion.'

Lancelot said,  
'That were against me : what I can I will ;'  
And there that day remain'd, and toward even 970  
Sent for his shield : full meekly rose the maid,  
Stript off the case, and gave the naked shield ;  
Then, when she heard his horse upon the stones,  
Unclasping flung the casement back, and look'd  
Down on his helm, from which her sleeve had gone.  
And Lancelot knew the little clinking sound ;  
And she by tact of love was well aware  
That Lancelot knew that she was looking at him.  
And yet he glanced not up, nor waved his hand,  
Nor bad farewell, but sadly rode away. 980  
This was the one discourtesy that he used.



So in her tower alone the maiden sat :  
His very shield was gone ; only the case,  
Her own poor work, her empty labour, left.  
But still she heard him, still his picture form'd  
And grew between her and the pictured wall.  
Then came her father, saying in low tones,  
'Have comfort,' whom she greeted quietly.  
Then came her brethren saying, 'Peace to thee,  
Sweet sister,' whom she answer'd with all calm. 990  
But when they left her to herself again,  
Death, like a friend's voice from a distant field  
Approaching thro' the darkness, call'd ; the owls  
Wailing had power upon her, and she mixt  
Her fancies with the sallow-rifted glooms  
Of evening, and the moanings of the wind.

And in those days she made a little song,  
And call'd her song 'The Song of Love and Death,'  
And sang it : sweetly could she make and sing.

'Sweet is true love tho' given in vain, in vain ;  
And sweet is death who puts an end to pain : 1001  
I know not which is sweeter, no, not I.

'Love, art thou sweet ? then bitter death must be  
Love, thou art bitter : sweet is death to me.  
O Love, if death be sweeter, let me die.

'Sweet love, that seems not made to fade away,  
Sweet death, that seems to make us loveless clay,  
I know not which is sweeter, no, not I.

'I fain would follow love, if that could be ;  
I needs must follow death, who calls for me ; 1010  
Call and I follow, I follow ! let me die.'

High with the last line scaled her voice, and this,  
All in a fiery dawning wild with wind  
That shook her tower, the brothers heard, and thought  
With shuddering, 'Hark the Phantom of the house  
That ever shrieks before a death,' and call'd  
The father, and all three in hurry and fear  
Ran to her, and lo! the blood-red light of dawn  
Flared on her face, she shrilling, 'Let me die!'

As when we dwell upon a word we know,      1020  
Repeating, till the word we know so well  
Becomes a wonder, and we know not why,  
So dwelt the father on her face, and thought  
'Is this Elaine?' till back the maiden fell,  
Then gave a languid hand to each, and lay,  
Speaking a still good-morrow with her eyes.  
At last she said, 'Sweet brothers, yesternight  
I seem'd a curious little maid again,  
As happy as when we dwelt among the woods,  
And when ye used to take me with the flood      1030  
Up the great river in the boatman's boat.  
Only ye would not pass beyond the cape  
That has the poplar on it: there ye fixt  
Your limit, oft returning with the tide.  
And yet I cried because ye would not pass  
Beyond it, and far up the shining flood  
Until we found the palace of the King.  
And yet ye would not; but this night I dream'd  
That I was all alone upon the flood,  
And then I said, "Now shall I have my will:"  
And there I woke, but still the wish remain'd.      1041  
So let me hence that I may pass at last  
Beyond the poplar and far up the flood,  
Until I find the palace of the King.  
There will I enter in among them all,  
And no man there will dare to mock at me;

But there the fine Gawain will wonder at me,  
And there the great Sir Lancelot muse at me ;  
Gawain, who bad a thousand farewells to me,  
Lancelot, who coldly went, nor bad me one : 1050  
And there the King will know me and my love,  
And there the Queen herself will pity me,  
And all the gentle court will welcome me,  
And after my long voyage I shall rest !

‘Peace,’ said her father, ‘O my child, ye seem  
Light-headed, for what force is yours to go  
So far, being sick ? and wherefore would ye look  
On this proud fellow again, who scorns us all ?’

Then the rough Torre began to heave and move,  
And bluster into stormy sobs and say, 1060  
‘I never loved him : an I meet with him,  
I care not howsoever great he be,  
Then will I strike at him and strike him down,  
Give me good fortune, I will strike him dead,  
For this discomfort he hath done the house.’

To whom the gentle sister made reply,  
‘Fret not yourself, dear brother, nor be wroth,  
Seeing it is no more Sir Lancelot’s fault  
Not to love me, than it is mine to love  
Him of all men who seems to me the highest.’ 1070

‘Highest ?’ the father answer’d, echoing ‘highest ?’  
(He meant to break the passion in her) ‘nay,  
Daughter, I know not what you call the highest ;  
But this I know, for all the people know it,  
He loves the Queen, and in an open shame :  
And she returns his love in open shame ;  
If this be high, what is it to be low ?’

Then spake the lily maid of Astolat :  
'Sweet father, all too faint and sick am I  
For anger : these are slanders : never yet 1080  
Was noble man but made ignoble talk.  
He makes no friend who never made a foe.  
But now it is my glory to have loved  
One peerless, without stain : so let me pass,  
My father, howso'er I seem to you,  
Not all unhappy, having loved God's best  
And greatest, tho' my love had no return :  
Yet, seeing you desire your child to live,  
Thanks, but you work against your own desire ;  
For if I could believe the things you say 1090  
I should but die the sooner ; wherefore cease,  
Sweet father, and bid call the ghostly man  
Hither, and let me shrive me clean, and die.'

So when the ghostly man had come and gone,  
She with a face, bright as for sin forgiven,  
Besought Lavaine to write as she devised  
A letter, word for word ; and when he ask'd  
'Is it for Lancelot, is it for my dear lord ?  
Then will I bear it gladly ;' she replied,  
'For Lancelot and the Queen and all the world, 1100  
But I myself must bear it.' Then he wrote  
The letter she devised ; which being writ  
And folded, 'O sweet father, tender and true,  
Deny me not,' she said—'ye never yet  
Denied my fancies—this, however strange,  
My latest : lay the letter in my hand  
A little ere I die, and close the hand  
Upon it ; I shall guard it even in death.  
And when the heat is gone from out my heart,  
Then take the little bed on which I died 1110  
For Lancelot's love, and deck it like the Queen's  
For richness, and me also like the Queen

In all I have of rich, and lay me on it.  
And let there be prepared a chariot-bier  
To take me to the river, and a barge  
Be ready on the river, clothed in black.  
I go in state to court, to meet the Queen.  
There surely I shall speak for mine own self,  
And none of you can speak for me so well.  
And therefore let our dumb old man alone      1120  
Go with me, he can steer and row, and he  
Will guide me to that palace, to the doors.'

She ceased : her father promised ; whereupon  
She grew so cheerful that they deem'd her death  
Was rather in the fantasy than the blood.  
But ten slow mornings past, and on the eleventh  
Her father laid the letter in her hand,  
And closed the hand upon it, and she died.  
So that day there was dole in Astolat.      1129

But when the next sun brake from underground,  
Then, those two brethren slowly with bent brows  
Accompanying, the sad chariot-bier  
Past like a shadow thro' the field, that shone  
Full-summer, to that stream whereon the barge,  
Pall'd all its length in blackest samite, lay.  
There sat the lifelong creature of the house,  
Loyal, the dumb old servitor, on deck,  
Winking his eyes, and twisted all his face.  
So those two brethren from the chariot took  
And on the black decks laid her in her bed,      1140  
Set in her hand a lily, o'er her hung  
The silken case with braided blazonings,  
And kiss'd her quiet brows, and saying to her  
'Sister, farewell for ever,' and again  
'Farewell, sweet sister,' parted all in tears.  
Then rose the dumb old servitor, and the dead,

Oar'd by the dumb, went upward with the flood—  
In her right hand the lily, in her left  
The letter— all her bright hair streaming down—  
And all the coverlid was cloth of gold 1150  
Drawn to her waist, and she herself in white  
All but her face, and that clear-featured face  
Was lovely, for she did not seem as dead,  
But fast asleep, and lay as tho' she smiled.

That day Sir Lancelot at the palace craved  
Audience of Guinevere, to give at last  
The price of half a realm, his costly gift,  
Hard-won and hardly won with bruise and blow,  
With deaths of others, and almost his own,  
The nine-years-fought-for diamonds: for he saw 1160  
One of her house, and sent him to the Queen  
Bearing his wish, whereto the Queen agreed  
With such and so unmoved a majesty  
She might have seem'd her statue, but that he,  
Low-drooping till he wellnigh kiss'd her feet  
For loyal awe, saw with a sidelong eye  
The shadow of some piece of pointed lace,  
In the Queen's shadow, vibrate on the walls,  
And parted, laughing in his courtly heart.

All in an oriel on the summer side, 1170  
Vine-clad, of Arthur's palace toward the stream,  
They met, and Lancelot kneeling utter'd, 'Queen,  
Lady, my liege, in whom I have my joy,  
Take, what I had not won except for you,  
These jewels, and make me happy, making them  
An armlet for the roundest arm on earth,  
Or necklace for a neck to which the swan's  
Is tawnier than her cygnet's: these are words:  
Your beauty is your beauty, and I sin  
In speaking, yet O grant my worship of it 1180

Words, as we grant grief tears. Such sin in words  
Perchance, we both can pardon : but, my Queen,  
I hear of rumours flying thro' your court.  
Our bond, as not the bond of man and wife,  
Should have in it an absoluter trust  
To make up that defect : let rumours be :  
When did not rumours fly ? these, as I trust  
That you trust me in your own nobleness,  
I may not well believe that you believe.'

While thus he spoke, half turn'd away, the Queen  
Brake from the vast oriel-embowering vine 1191  
Leaf after leaf, and tore, and cast them off,  
Till all the place whereon she stood was green ;  
Then, when he ceased, in one cold passive hand  
Received at once and laid aside the gems  
There on a table near her, and replied :

'It may be, I am quicker of belief  
Than you believe me, Lancelot of the Lake.  
Our bond is not the bond of man and wife.  
This good is in it, whatsoe'er of ill, 1200  
It can be broken easier. I for you  
This many a year have done despite and wrong  
To one whom ever in my heart of hearts  
I did acknowledge nobler. What are these ?  
Diamonds for me ! they had been thrice their worth  
Being your gift, had you not lost your own.  
To loyal hearts the value of all gifts  
Must vary as the giver's. Not for me !  
For her ! for your new fancy. Only this  
Grant me, I pray you : have your joys apart. 1210  
I doubt not that however changed, you keep  
So much of what is graceful : and myself  
Would shun to break those bounds of courtesy  
In which as Arthur's Queen I move and rule :

So cannot speak my mind. An end to this!  
 A strange one! yet I take it with Amen.  
 So pray you, add my diamonds to her pearls;  
 Deck her with these; tell her, she shines me down:  
 An armlet for an arm to which the Queen's  
 Is haggard, or a necklace for a neck 1220  
 O as much fairer—as a faith once fair  
 Was richer than these diamonds—hers not mine—  
 Nay, by the mother of our Lord himself,  
 Or hers or mine, mine now to work my will—  
 She shall not have them.'

Saying which she seized,  
 And, thro' the casement standing wide for heat,  
 Flung them, and down they flash'd, and smote the  
 stream.

Then from the smitten surface flash'd, as it were,  
 Diamonds to meet them, and they past away.  
 Then while Sir Lancelot leant, in half disdain 1230  
 At love, life, all things, on the window ledge,  
 Close underneath his eyes, and right across  
 Where these had fallen, slowly past the barge  
 Whereon the lily maid of Astolat  
 Lay smiling, like a star in blackest night.

But the wild Queen, who saw not, burst away  
 To weep and wail in secret; and the barge,  
 On to the palace-doorway sliding, paused.  
 There two stood arm'd, and kept the door; to whom,  
 All up the marble stair, tier over tier, 1240  
 Were added mouths that gaped, and eyes that ask'd  
 'What is it?' but that oarsman's haggard face,  
 As hard and still as is the face that men  
 Shape to their fancy's eye from broken rocks  
 On some cliff-side, appall'd them, and they said,  
 'He is enchanted, cannot speak—and she,



Look how she sleeps—the Fairy Queen, so fair !  
Yea, but how pale ! what are they ? flesh and blood ?  
Or come to take the King to Fairyland ?  
For some do hold our Arthur cannot die,                   1250  
But that he passes into Fairyland.’

While thus they babbled of the King, the King  
Came girt with knights : then turn’d the tongueless  
man

From the half-face to the full-eye, and rose  
And pointed to the damsel, and the doors.  
So Arthur bad the meek Sir Percivale  
And pure Sir Galahad to uplift the maid ;  
And reverently they bore her into hall.  
Then came the fine Gawain and wonder’d at her,  
And Lancelot later came and mused at her,                   1260  
And last the Queen herself, and pitied her :  
But Arthur spied the letter in her hand,  
Stoopt, took, brake seal, and read it ; this was all :

‘Most noble lord, Sir Lancelot of the Lake,  
I, sometime call’d the maid of Astolat,  
Come, for you left me taking no farewell,  
Hither, to take my last farewell of you.  
I loved you, and my love had no return,  
And therefore my true love has been my death.  
And therefore to our Lady Guinevere,                   1270  
And to all other ladies, I make moan :  
Pray for my soul, and yield me burial.  
Pray for my soul thou too, Sir Lancelot,  
As thou art a knight peerless.’

Thus he read ;

And ever in the reading, lords and dames  
Wept, looking often from his face who read  
To hers which lay so silent, and at times,

So touch'd were they, half-thinking that her lips,  
Who had devised the letter, moved again.

Then freely spoke Sir Lancelot to them all : 1280  
'My lord liege Arthur, and all ye that hear,  
Know that for this most gentle maiden's death  
Right heavy am I ; for good she was and true,  
But loved me with a love beyond all love  
In women, whomsoever I have known.  
Yet to be loved makes not to love again ;  
Not at my years, however it hold in youth.  
I swear by truth and knighthood that I gave  
No cause, not willingly, for such a love :  
To this I call my friends in testimony, 1290  
Her brethren, and her father, who himself  
Besought me to be plain and blunt, and use,  
To break her passion, some discourtesy  
Against my nature : what I could, I did.  
I left her and I bad her no farewell ;  
Tho', had I dreamt the damsel would have died,  
I might have put my wits to some rough use,  
And help'd her from herself.'

Then said the Queen  
(Sea was her wrath, yet working after storm)  
'Ye might at least have done her so much grace, 1300  
Fair lord, as would have help'd her from her death.'  
He raised his head, their eyes met and hers fell,  
He adding,

'Queen, she would not be content  
Save that I wedded her, which could not be.  
Then might she follow me thro' the world, she ask'd ;  
It could not be. I told her that her love  
Was but the flash of youth, would darken down  
To rise hereafter in a stiller flame  
Toward one more worthy of her—then would I,

More specially were he, she wedded, poor, 1310  
Estate them with large land and territory  
In mine own realm beyond the narrow seas,  
To keep them in all joyance: more than this  
I could not; this she would not, and she died.'

He pausing, Arthur answer'd, 'O my knight,  
It will be to thy worship, as my knight,  
And mine, as head of all our Table Round,  
To see that she be buried worshipfully.'

So toward that shrine which then in all the realm  
Was richest, Arthur leading, slowly went 1320  
The marshall'd Order of their Table Round,  
And Lancelot sad beyond his wont, to see  
The maiden buried, not as one unknown,  
Nor meanly, but with gorgeous obsequies,  
And mass, and rolling music, like a queen.  
And when the knights had laid her comely head  
Low in the dust of half-forgotten kings,  
Then Arthur spake among them, 'Let her tomb  
Be costly, and her image thereupon,  
And let the shield of Lancelot at her feet 1330  
Be carven, and her lily in her hand.  
And let the story of her dolorous voyage  
For all true hearts be blazon'd on her tomb  
In letters gold and azure!' which was wrought  
Thereafter; but when now the lords and dames  
And people, from the high door streaming, brake  
Disorderly, as homeward each, the Queen,  
Who mark'd Sir Lancelot where he moved apart,  
Drew near, and sigh'd in passing, 'Lancelot,  
Forgive me; mine was jealousy in love.' 1340  
He answer'd with his eyes upon the ground,  
'That is love's curse; pass on, my Queen, forgiven.'

But Arthur, who beheld his cloudy brows,  
Approach'd him, and with full affection said,

'Lancelot, my Lancelot, thou in whom I have  
Most joy and most affiance, for I know  
What thou hast been in battle by my side,  
And many a time have watch'd thee at the tilt  
Strike down the lusty and long-practised knight,  
And let the younger and unskill'd go by 1350  
To win his honour and to make his name,  
And loved thy courtesies and thee, a man  
Made to be loved; but now I would to God,  
Seeing the homeless trouble in thine eyes,  
Thou couldst have loved this maiden, shaped, it seems,  
By God for thee alone, and from her face,  
If one may judge the living by the dead,  
Delicately pure and marvellously fair,  
Who might have brought thee, now a lonely man  
Wifeless and heirless, noble issue, sons 1360  
Born to the glory of thy name and fame,  
My knight, the great Sir Lancelot of the Lake.'

Then answer'd Lancelot, 'Fair she was, my King,  
Pure, as you ever wish your knights to be.  
To doubt her fairness were to want an eye,  
To doubt her pureness were to want a heart—  
Yea, to be loved, if what is worthy love  
Could bind him, but free love will not be bound.'

'Free love, so bound, were freest,' said the King.  
'Let love be free; free love is for the best: 1370  
And, after heaven, on our dull side of death,  
What should be best, if not so pure a love  
Clothed in so pure a loveliness? yet thee  
She fail'd to bind, tho' being, as I think,  
Unbound as yet, and gentle, as I know.'

And Lancelot answer'd nothing, but he went,  
And at the inrunning of a little brook  
Sat by the river in a cove, and watch'd  
The high reed wave, and lifted up his eyes  
And saw the barge that brought her moving down,  
Far-off, a blot upon the stream, and said 1381  
Low in himself, 'Ah simple heart and sweet,  
Ye loved me, damsel, surely with a love  
Far tenderer than my Queen's. Pray for thy soul?  
Ay, that will I. Farewell too—now at last—  
Farewell, fair lily. "Jealousy in love?"  
Not rather dead love's harsh heir, jealous pride?  
Queen, if I grant the jealousy as of love,  
May not your crescent fear for name and fame  
Speak, as it waxes, of a love that wanes? 1390  
Why did the King dwell on my name to me?  
Mine own name shames me, seeming a reproach,  
Lancelot, whom the Lady of the Lake  
Caught from his mother's arms—the wondrous one  
Who passes thro' the vision of the night—  
She chanted snatches of mysterious hymns  
Heard on the winding waters, eve and morn  
She kiss'd me saying, "Thou art fair, my child,  
As a king's son," and often in her arms  
She bare me, pacing on the dusky mere. 1400  
Would she had drown'd me in it, where'er it be!  
For what am I? what profits me my name  
Of greatest knight? I fought for it, and have it:  
Pleasure to have it, none; to lose it, pain;  
Now grown a part of me: but what use in it?  
To make men worse by making my sin known?  
Or sin seem less, the sinner seeming great?  
Alas for Arthur's greatest knight, a man  
Not after Arthur's heart! I needs must break  
These bonds that so defame me: not without 1410  
She wills it: would I, if she will'd it? nay,

Who knows? but if I would not, then may God,  
I pray him, send a sudden Angel down  
To seize me by the hair and bear me far,  
And fling me deep in that forgotten mere,  
Among the tumbled fragments of the hills.'

So groan'd Sir Lancelot in remorseful pain,  
Not knowing he should die a holy man.

## NOTES.

1. The action of the poem opens, as in *Geraint and Enid* and several other of the *Idylls*, at a central point. Elaine already has the shield of Lancelot in her charge. The poet breaks off at l. 28 to tell the tale of how it came into her keeping, the account of which lasts down to l. 396.

**Elaine the fair.** This Idyll is founded on chapters 8-20 of Book xviii. of Malory's *Morte d'Arthur*. In chapter 9 we read: "This old baron had a daughter that time that was called the fair maid of Astolat. And ever she beheld Sir Launcelot wonderfully. And, as the book saith, she cast such love unto Launcelot that she could never withdraw her love, wherefore she died: and her name was Elaine le Blank" (*i.e.* the white, the fair). There was another Elaine, the daughter of King Pelles or Pellam, and mother, by Lancelot, of Galahad.

2. **lily maid.** This phrase emphasizes the epithet "fair" above. Similarly *lily hand* is used for *white hand*, as in Cowper, *Task*, ii. 424, "the diamond on his lily hand."

**Astolat.** Malory, xviii. 8, writes: "A town called Astolat, that is now in English called Gilford," *i.e.* Guildford, in Surrey, 30 miles south-west of London. The town is situated in a depression of the North Downs, on the river Wey, a tributary of the Thames. But as the barge in l. 1147 goes "upward with the flood" from Astolat to Westminster, Tennyson's Astolat would seem to be on the Thames below London.

4. **sacred.** The shield was sacred in her eyes, because she regarded it as a solemn trust.

5. **first**, at first; when she first took charge of it.

6. **the gleam.** The gleam was reflected from the bright surface of the shield.

7. **soilure.** The word occurs in Shakspeare, *Troilus and Cressida*, iv. i. 56: "Not making any scruple of her soilure." It

was the custom for knights to keep their shields covered, to prevent tarnishing.

8. **braided, embroidered.** But *braid* and *broider* are from different roots, and have different meanings, although in the authorized version of the Bible (1 *Timothy*, ii. 9, "with broided hair"), *broided* is used in the sense of *braided*, being a translation of Gk. πλέγματα, plaits (of hair). The Revised Version reads "braided hair." *Braid* is from a Teutonic base *bragd*, meaning 'to swing, brandish, turn about,' hence 'to entwine, weave, plait': *broider* is from Fr. *broder*, *border*, from *bord*, edge, and meant originally 'to work on the edge,' hence 'to ornament with needlework.' The older form of *braid* is *broid*; hence the confusion between the two words. Cf. ll. 371, 1142, below.

9. **devices, armorial bearings.**

**blazon'd**, portrayed in colours, an heraldic term from old Fr. *blason*, a shield, then a coat of arms painted on a shield. Tennyson uses the verb in the sense of 'to colour' or to 'figure in colours' either of shields as here, or of stained glass windows, as in *In Memoriam*, xxxvii. 8: "The prophets blazon'd on the panes." Cf. *The Daisy*, 58: "The giant windows' blazon'd fires."

10. **In their own tinct**, in their proper colours. 'Tinct' is used by Shakspere, *Hamlet*, III. iv. 91, and *Cymbeline*, II. ii. 23; the modern form is *tint*.

of her wit, out of her own fancy. In embroidering the case, she copied the shield exactly, and then added a border of her own invention.

11. **fantasy**, fanciful design to ornament the border.

12. **yellow-throated**, observe the accuracy of the epithet. Tennyson is always true to nature; cf. General Introduction, p. xvii. 2 (a).

13. **Nor rested thus content**, but did not rest contented with what she had done.

16. **read, studied, conned.**

17. **arms**, armorial bearings, the "devices blazon'd on the shield."

18. **made a pretty history**, invented a fanciful account.

19. **dint**. Originally *dint* (O. E. *dynt*) meant a 'blow,' as in Milton, *Par. Lost*, II. 813:—

"That mortal dint,

Save he who reigns above, none can resist."

Hence, as here, 'an indentation made by a blow.' It has the sense of 'power, force,' in the phrase 'by dint of.'



21. Conjecturing when and where, guessing as to when and where the dints and scratches were made, and saying to herself "This cut is fresh," etc.

22. *Caerlyle*, Carlisle in Cumberland. *Kair Leil* is the spelling in Geoffrey of Monmouth, and *Carleol* that of the mediæval historians. The name is Cymric. There is some reason for believing that it was Arthur's Capital; later ages transferred the title to *Caerleon-upon-Usk*.

23. *Caerleon*, *Caerleon-upon-Usk* in South Wales, the old *Isca Silurum*, which became known in the neighbourhood as *Castra Legionis*, 'the (Roman) Legion's Camp'—the Roman Second Legion having its station there,—a name shortened on Cymric lips unto *Kair Leon* or *Caerleon*. Cf. *Geraint and Enid*, 145, 146:—

"For Arthur on the Whitsuntide before  
Held court at old *Caerleon-upon-Usk*."

One of Arthur's twelve great battles was fought at this *Caerleon*; see below, l. 296.

*Camelot*, now identified with a village called *Queen Camel* in Somersetshire, where remains of the vast entrenchments of an ancient town are still to be seen. The traditions of *Queen Camel* still preserve the name of Arthur; the bridge over the river Camel is called 'Arthur's Bridge'; and there is a spring in the neighbourhood called 'Arthur's Well.' Malory (xviii. 8) identifies *Camelot* with Winchester, see note to l. 76 below. But in Tennyson's *Idylls* *Camelot* is a mystic city, the locality of which is left unfixed by the poet. For descriptions of *Camelot*, see *Gareth and Lynette*, 296-302, and *The Holy Grail*, 339-351.

24. *God's Mercy*, short for 'God's mercy guard us'—an interjectional phrase.

26. *Broke the strong lance*, etc. Scan

Brôke the | stróng lánce, | and ról'l'd | his ene|my dówm,

Notice how the trochee in the first foot followed by a spondee with a pause after it, represents the sudden snap of the lance shaft, while the three syllables in the fourth foot seem to bring before us the toppling downfall of the unhorsed knight. Cf. almost the same rhythm in *Geraint and Enid*, 160:—

And thén | bráke shórt, | and dówm | his ene|my ról'l'd.

27. *lived in fantasy*, gave herself up to romantic fancies.

31. *jousts*, *joust* or *just* is literally a 'meeting,' from Lat. *juxta*, 'near, close': hence, 'a tilt, a tournament.' So in the days of duelling, to 'meet' was often used of a hostile encounter. In *The Last Tournament*, 51, Tennyson uses *jousts* as a singular, as Malory does in note to l. 76 below.

35. **Lyonnesse.** A fabulous country, an extension of Cornwall to the south and west, said to be now covered by the sea. There is still extant in the neighbourhood of Land's End a tradition that the Scilly Isles were once part of the mainland: similarly, in parts of Ireland a belief exists that a large portion of the island was swallowed up by the sea and occasionally comes to the surface. The name is sometimes written *Leonnoys* or *Liones*.

36. **boulder**, a word of Scandinavian origin, from the same root as *bellow* (the *d* being excrement), and meaning literally 'stones that make a thundering noise' (when rolled over by the waves).

**tarn** is also Scandinavian, and means a 'small lake,' generally used of mountain lakes with no outlet.

39. **For here two brothers.** This story (which does not occur in Malory) is referred to again in *The Last Tournament*, 36, 37:—

"Those diamonds that I (i.e. Arthur) rescued from the tarn,  
And Lancelot won, methought, for thee to wear."

41. **at a blow**, with a single blow. Cf. "at a touch," l. 148.

44. **lichen'd ... the crags**, so covered with lichen as to be of the same colour as the rocks. Cf. *Edward Morris*, 8: "turrets lichen-gilded like a rock." Lichen is a species of flowerless plant of a greenish or yellowish colour, which spreads over the surface of trees or rocks like moss; generally derived from the Gk. *λελκεν*, 'to lick (up),' from its habit of encroachment.

46. **aside**, on (each) side.

48. **All in**, altogether in, enveloped with; *all* is adverbial here.

52. **Fled like ... the tarn.** Notice the unaccented syllables in this line, representing the rapid motion and repeated flashes of the rolling jewels. See General Introduction, p. xxv. (g) (2). Cf. the same rhythm in *Enoch Arden*, 583:—

"Of some precipitous rivulet to the sea."

53. **shingly scaur**, sloping rock or cliff covered with loose pebbles. *Shingle* is from the same root as *sing*, and the name denotes the crunching noise made in walking over coarse gravel; cf. *Enoch Arden*, 733:—

"Lest the harsh shingle should grate underfoot."

*Scaur*, sometimes spelt *scar*, as in the 'Bugle-song' in *The Princess* ("cliff and scar"), is from the same root as *share*, *shear*, and meant originally 'a rock cut off from the mainland,' hence 'a rock.' *Shingle*, in the sense of 'a wooden tile,' is also from the same root as '*shear*,' while *scar*, meaning 'the mark of a wound or burn,' is from Gk. *εσχαρά*, a fireplace.

58, 59. **whereupon I chanced Divinely**, which I happened to find by heavenly guidance.

62. by nine years' proof, by a test extending over nine years (since there were nine diamonds; see l. 46).

64. drive, drive before us, scatter.

65. The heathen, Saxons and Norsemen, "the heathen of the Northern Sea" (*Geraint and Enid*, 968). Malory tells of an invasion of Britain by 40,000 'Saracens,' meaning probably 'infidels, heathen.'

67. still, always, on each occasion.

71. To snare her royal fancy, to take captive the queen's heart.

75. Hard on, right upon the bank of.

75, 76. the place ... hugest, London. Malory (xviii. 3) relates how the queen "let make a privy dinner in London unto the Knights of the Round Table": he narrates the proclamation of the diamond jousts in chapter 8 of the same book of the *Morte d'Arthur*.

76. let proclaim, i.e. 'made them proclaim, caused to be proclaimed': see note to ll. 75, 76, above, and the common use of *lassen* in German; also *The Marriage of Geraint*, 152, 153:—

"Then the good King gave orders to let blow  
His horns for hunting on the morrow morn."

This *let* and *let* in the sense of 'to hinder,' as in line 94 below (see note), have both been traced to the same root, from which also *late* is derived. Malory's words (xviii. 8) are: "The King let cry a great jousts and a tournament that should be that day at Camelot, that is Winchester."

78. for she had been sick. Cf. Malory, xviii. 8: "So King Arthur made him ready to depart to these jousts and would have had the queen with him: but that time she would not, she said, for she was sick and might not ride at that time. That me repenteth, said the king, for this seven year ye saw not such a fellowship together, except at Whitsuntide, when Galahad departed from the court. Truly, said the queen to the king, you must hold me excused, I may not be there, and that me repenteth."

84. dwelt languidly, fixed upon him a soft, tender gaze. Cf. *Eleanore*, 76: "The languors of thy love-deep eyes."

86. there, i.e. in her eyes.

89. Love-loyal, obedient through love. A good example of Tennyson's alliterative double words: cf. in this Idyll *tiny-trumpeting* (l. 137), *barren-beaten* (l. 160), *green-glimmering* (l. 481), *strange-statued* (l. 795); and see Introduction, p. xxvii. (h).

91. **tale**, sum, full number. The original signification of the word was probably 'order'; hence (1) 'number,' (2) 'orderly arrangement of speech, narrative.' Cf. Bible, *Exodus*, v. 8, "the tale of bricks," i.e. the full number.

for his destined boon, see ll. 70, 71, above.

92. **Urged him**, etc. Cf. Malory, xviii. 8: "And many deemed the queen would not be there because of Sir Launcelot du Lake, for Sir Launcelot would not ride with the king: for he said he was not whole of the wound the which Sir Mador had given him. Wherefore the king was heavy and passing wroth."

93. **whole**, healed. *Whole* and *heal* are from the same root; to be "made whole," = to be healed, is common in the New Testament.

94. **lets me from**, etc., hinders me from riding. To *let* in this sense meant originally 'to make late'; but *late* itself is from the same root as the other *let*, 'to allow, to let alone,' and denoted 'what is let alone or neglected,' hence 'slothful, slow, coming behind.' This *let*, to hinder, is derived directly from O. E. *lettan*; *let*, to allow, from O. E. *létan*. See note to l. 76, above.

95. **Glanced first**, etc. The "vague suspicion" (see l. 127, below) here first suggests itself for a moment to the king that Lancelot might be staying behind for Guinevere's sake.

96. **No sooner gone**, i.e. no sooner was he gone.

97. **To blame**, etc. Cf. Malory, xviii. 8: "Sir Launcelot, ye are greatly to blame thus to hold you behind my lord: what, trow ye, what will your enemies and mine say and deem? nought else but see how Sir Launcelot holdeth him ever behind the king, and so doth the queen, for that they would be together; and thus they will say, said the queen to Sir Launcelot, have ye no doubt thereof." *To blame* is a gerundial infinitive expressing condition; 'you are to blame' = 'you are blamable.'

103. **Are ye so wise?** "How discreet you are!" said ironically. Cf. Malory, xviii. 9: "Madam, said Sir Launcelot, I allow your wit, 'tis of late come sin ye were so wise, and therefore, Madam, as at this time I will be ruled by your counsel, and this night I will take my rest, and to-morrow by time will take my way toward Winchester."

106. **the myriad cricket**, the innumerable crickets, the swarm of crickets. Cf. *Enoch Arden*, 579:—

"The myriad shriek of wheeling ocean-fowl."

107. **When its own voice**, etc., when each blade of grass seems to have a voice of its own (the cricket on it being invisible).

108. **is nothing**, is unworthy of attention,

110. **my loyal worship**, etc. Cf. *Merlin and Vivien*, 7-15 :—

“The Cornish king had heard a wandering voice,  
A minstrel of Carleon by strong storm  
Blown into shelter at Tintagil, say  
That out of naked, knightlike purity  
Sir Lancelot worshipt no unmarried girl  
But the great Queen herself, fought in her name,  
Swore by her—vows like theirs, that high in heaven  
Love most, but neither marry, nor are given  
In marriage, angels of our Lord’s report.”

110, 111. **allow’d Of**, approved by. This ‘allow’ is from Fr. *allouer*, to approve, from Lat. *ad*, to, and *laudare*, to praise; ‘allow’ in the sense of ‘permit’ is from Fr. *allouer*, to assign as a portion, from Lat. *ad*, to, and *locare*, to place: see ll. 152, 201, below.

115. **Have pledged**, etc., have coupled our names together in drinking our healths at banquets.

116. **is there more?** is there anything further that I do not know of?

118. **devoir**, literally, ‘duty’; hence often used, as here, of the devotion of a knight to his lady.

121. **the faultless King**, etc. Cf. *Maud*, Part I., ii. 6, 7 :—

“Faultily faultless, icily regular, splendidly null,  
Dead perfection, no more.”

‘That passionate perfection’ means ‘that passionately perfect man.’

123. **But who**, etc., i.e. such stainless purity as Arthur’s is (to use Wordsworth’s phrase in “She was a Phantom of Delight”) something

“too bright and good  
For human nature’s daily food.”

Cf. also the same poet’s lines “On Mrs. Wordsworth” :—

“Let other bards of angels sing,  
Bright suns without a spot;  
But thou art no such perfect thing.”

125. **untruth**, disloyalty to him.

126. **He cares not for me**. Guinevere’s argument is that the absence of suspicion on Arthur’s part proves his want of love. Arthur’s explanation of his blindness is a very different one: see *Guinevere*, 536, 537 :—

“I weighed thy heart with one  
Too wholly thine to dream untruth in thee.”

128. **tamper'd with him**, surreptitiously influenced him. *Tamper*, another form of *temper*, to modify, is used of underhand and malicious interference.

130. **swearing men to vows**, taking oaths from men that they would keep vows. These vows are described in *Gareth and Lynette*, 542-544, as vows

"Of utter hardihood, utter gentleness,  
And, loving, utter faithfulness in love,  
And uttermost obedience to the king ;"

and in the same Idyll (266-268) Merlin calls them

"such vows as is a shame  
A man should not be bound by, yet the which  
No man can keep."

Cf., in *Guinevere* (463-479), the well-known passage beginning

"I made them lay their hands in mine and swear  
To reverence the king as if he were  
Their conscience, and their conscience as their king."

In *The Last Tournament* (693, 694), Tristram calls the vows

"inviolable vows,  
Which flesh and blood perforce would violate."

132. **He is all fault**, etc. Cf. Sheffield, *Essay on Poetry* :—

"A faultless monster which the world ne'er saw."

See also note to ll. 121, 122, above.

133. **a touch of earth**, some taint of human weakness. Earth, or weak human nature, is opposed to heaven, or sublimity of character.

134. **The low sun**, etc., i.e. to make the clouds glow with colour the sun must be rising or setting and so be low in the heavens and seemingly nearer the earth. In l. 412, below, it is the *breaking* day that "shoots red fire." "The low sun" is opposed to the "sun in heaven" (l. 123) which is mere white light.

135. **save by the bond**, except by the bond of marriage.

137-139. **The tiny-trumpeting... loud**. As even the weak piping of the gnat can wake us out of our sweetest dreams, so the mean gossip of the Court may arouse suspicion against us. For *tiny-trumpeting*, see note to l. 89.

143. **who honours**, etc. Cf. *Guinevere*, 466, where one of the oaths taken by Arthur's knights is

"To honour his own word as if his God's."

And *Gareth and Lynette*, 287 :—

"the king  
Who cannot brook the shadow of a lie."

Also *The Coming of Arthur*, 132:—

“And Arthur said ‘Man’s word is God in man.’”

145. **A moral child**, etc., moral and upright, but simple as a child, and so without the shrewdness and skill necessary in a ruler.

147. **wit**, intelligence enough to find a way out of the difficulty.

151. **true**, truth-loving.

152. **allow**, permit, admit: see note to ll. 110, 201.

153. **to speak him true**, to describe him as he really is.

156. **They prove to him his work**, i.e. in winning glory, his knights show him that his work in training them has been successful. ‘Prove’ means ‘justify, make good.’

159. **Wroth at himself**, “vext at having lied in vain” (l. 102, above).

160. **barren-beaten**, made hard and barren by being trodden: cf. note to l. 89.

161. **show’d the rarer foot**, showed by its greenness that fewer feet had trodden it.

162. **solitary downs**. Guildford is on the North Downs. See note to l. 2 above.

163. **lost in fancy, lost his way**. A good instance of one of the characteristics of Tennyson’s style, consisting in a kind of sound-play,—the repetition of a word (often in a modified form) in the same or in a slightly different sense. (Cf. General Introduction, p. xxiii. f.) This epigrammatic iteration has a peculiarly emphatic effect. Cf. ll. 233 (*slightly—slight*), 264 (*kindly—kind*), 1158 (*hard-won—hardly-won*), 1316, 1318 (*worship—worshipfully*). It is employed by other poets, as Spenser, *Faery Queene*, i. x. 45:—

“There she awhile him stayed, him self to rest  
That to the *rest* more able he might bee;”

Shakspere, *Macbeth*, iii. ii. 20:—

“Whom we, to gain our *peace*, have sent to *peace*;”

Milton, *Par. Lost*, i. 666, 667:—

“*Highly* they raged  
Against the *Highest*;”

and Cowper, *The Task*, iv. 399:—

“With all this *thrif*t they *thrive* not.”

164. **traced... track**. Both these words are from the Lat. *tractum*, drawn; *traho*, I draw.

165. **links**, windings; often used in Scotland of the meanderings of a river, as 'the links of Forth,' near Stirling. For *loops*, cf. *Gareth and Lynette*, 596, 597 :—

“A river  
Runs in three loops about her living-place.”

167. **Fired from the west**, lighted up by the glowing rays of the setting sun.

168. **made**, i.e. made his way.

169. **myriad-wrinkled**, covered with innumerable wrinkles. Tennyson has also *myriad-minded*, *myriad-rolling*, *myriad-room'd*, all formed on the Homeric pattern.

171. **wordless**. A Shaksperian word: see *Lucrece*, 112: “And, wordless, so greets heaven.”

181. **Livest between the lips**, art known to men. Cf. *The Gardener's Daughter*, 49, 50: “Among us lived Her fame from lip to lip.” Cf. Ennius's epitaph upon himself (*Epigr.* l. 4), *Volito vivu' per ora virum*, imitated by Vergil, *Georgics*, iii. 9, *Victorque virum volitare per ora*, where however *ora* is believed by Conington to refer to faces rather than mouths, the passage being translated ‘in triumph, to hover before the faces of men.’ A better parallel is Vergil, *Aeneid*, xii. 234, 235 :—

*Ille quidem ad superos, quorum se devovet aris,  
Succedet fama, vivusque per ora feretur,*

which Conington renders—

‘Aye, Turnus’ name to heaven shall rise,  
Devoted to whose shrine he dies,  
On lips of thousands borne.’

181, 182. **by thy state And presence**, judging by thy stature and noble bearing. Cf. *The Marriage of Geraint*, 430-432, which are almost word for word the same as ll. 181-183 here.

183. **who eat in Arthur's halls**. See note to l. 254.

193. **Blank**, with no coat of arms emblazoned on it. So in *Gareth and Lynette*, 1186, when Lancelot wishes to escape recognition he rides with “his blue shield-lions cover'd.”

195. **Hurt in his first tilt**. Cf. Malory, xviii. 9: “And he was hurt that same day that he was made knight, that he may not ride.”

196. **God wot**, God knows. *Wot* is the 3rd person singular, present tense, indicative mood of *wit*; the preterite tense is *wiste* or *wist*.

**blank enough**. He had been unable to win the right to have



his shield blazoned. We read in *Gareth and Lynette*, 397-399, that in Arthur's hall at Camelot

"Along the front  
Some blazon'd, some but carven, and some blank,  
There ran a treble row of stony shields,"

and (405-409) that

"When some good knight had done one noble deed,  
His arms were carven only ; but if twain  
His arms were blazon'd also ; but if none,  
The shield was blank and bare without a sign  
Saving the name beneath."

197. **plain**, plain-spoken, blunt. Sir Torre had had no opportunity of learning "the courtesies of the Court," and was somewhat soured, perhaps, by his misfortune.

201. **Allow him**, give him leave, excuse him : see note to l. 110.

202. **lustihood**, strength and vigour : cf. 'lustily,' l. 494, and 'lusty,' l. 1349, below.

205. **wilful**. The father speaks playfully. Cf. l. 745, below :—

"Father, you call me wilful, and the fault  
Is yours, who let me have my will."

208. **play'd on**, practised upon, made sport of. The origin of the metaphor is seen in Shakspeare, *Hamlet*, III. ii. 347, etc. Hamlet says to Guildenstern, "You would play upon me ... do you think I am easier to be played on than a fife?" Cf. *Gareth and Lynette*, 1220, 1221 :—

"The marvel dies, and leaves me fool'd and trick'd,  
And only wondering wherefore play'd upon."

213. **And slipt**, etc. An unconscious prophecy of what really happened : see l. 1238, below.

214. **belike**, probably.

218. **an if**, short for *and if*. *And* in the sense of *if* was in common use in Middle English. In order to mark off the two meanings of *and* more readily, it became usual to drop the final *d* when the word was used in the sense of 'if.' Later, when the force of *an* grew misty, it was reduplicated by the addition of 'if'; so that *an if* really meaning 'if-if' is of common occurrence : it is frequent in Shakspeare.

222. **So ye will grace me**, provided that you will favour me. The full construction is 'If it be so that ye will,' etc., and so seems to mean 'on this condition,' viz., 'that you will,' etc. : see Abbott, *Shaks. Grammar*, § 183. Cf. l. 954, below, and *Gareth and Lynette*, 131, 146, 262, 507, etc.

227. **fair**, fine, beautiful.

233. slightly ... slight. See note to l. 163, above.

235. courtly, yet not falsely. Lancelot's courtesy was not like Gawain's, which was "courtesy with a touch of traitor in it": see l. 635, below.

236. If what is fair, etc. If beautiful things are suitable only for beautiful people, and if only queens are to be reckoned beautiful, then my opinion may be an over bold one, which is that this maid is so beautiful that she might fitly wear the most beautiful jewel in the world.

240. Not violating, etc., i.e. without going contrary to the rule that beautiful things should be given to beautiful persons.

244. The great and guilty love, etc., i.e. the violent struggle between his love for the queen and his love for Arthur.

246. marr'd his face. Cf. Milton, *Par. Lost*, iv. 116: "(each passion) marr'd his borrowed visage." In *The Last Tournament* (569-572) Tristram thinks that the queen must be "haughty" to Lancelot as he has seen him look "wan enow."

ere his time, prematurely.

247. on such heights, having as his partner in guilt one of such exalted rank.

249. the sleeper. This *the* is not the ordinary Definite Article, but represents *thē*, the old instrumental case of *the* used as a Demonstrative Pronoun, and means 'by that much, in that degree.' Cf. "*the* sooner, *the* better."

250, 251. like a fiend ... drove him, etc. So in the Bible, *Mark*, v. 2-5, *Luke*, viii. 29, the "man with an unclean spirit" had "his dwelling in the tombs ... and always, night and day, he was in the mountains and in the tombs ... and was driven of the devil into the wilderness."

253. the goodliest man, etc. Malory (xxi. 13) tells how Lancelot's friend lamented over his dead body: "And thou were the goodliest person ever came among press of knights; and thou was the meekest man and the gentlest that ever ate in hall among ladies." Milton (*Par. Lost*, iv. 323) calls Adam "the goodliest man of men since born His sons."

252. who was yet, etc., i.e. although he was not "dead in trespasses and sins," his conscience not having grown callous and proof against the stings of remorse.

256. However marr'd, etc. This description of the chief of the knights with his face marred by his sin recalls Milton's fine picture (*Par. Lost*, i. 599-602) of the chief of the fallen angels:—

"Darkened so, yet shone  
Above them all the Archangel; but his face  
Deep scars of thunder had intrench'd, and care  
Sat on his faded cheek."

In *Merlin and Vivien*, Vivien, on first seeing Lancelot, says, "Is that the Lancelot? goodly—ay, but gaunt."

257. Seam'd ... cheek. Cf. *Malory*, xviii. 13, "Then the hermit ... saw by a wound on his cheek that he was Sir Launcelot."

259. her doom, sentence of destiny, her ruin, her destruction.

263. as in a smaller time, such as men might show in days less noble and true than the era of Arthur.

264. kindly ... kind. See note to l. 163. Cf. *In Memoriam*, lxvi. 5, 7:—

"The shade by which my life was crost

Has made me kindlier with my kind."

*Kin* and *kind* (substantive and adjective) are from the same root *gan*, to generate. See Trench, *On the study of Words*: "a 'kind' person is a 'kinned' person, one of a kin; one who acknowledges his kinship with other men, and acts upon it; confesses that he owes to them, as of one blood with himself, the debt of love. And so *mankind* is *mankinned*." Cf. Shakspeare's well-known jingle between the two words (*Hamlet*, i. ii. 65):—

"A little more than kin and less than kind."

269. glanced at, incidentally alluded to.

270. Suddenly speaking, etc., i.e. he quickly changed the subject in order to avoid talking of the queen.

the wordless man. See ll. 169, 171, above.

272. The heathen. See note to l. 65, above; and cf. the maiming of the churl by the heathen knight in *The Last Tournament*, 56 *et seq.*

278, 279. broke The Pagan, conquered the heathen Saxons.

279. yet once more, i.e. in the last of his twelve great battles.

Badon hill. See note to l. 301, below.

280-282. rapt By all, etc. On this passage Mr. Churton Collins (*Illustrations of Tennyson*) remarks, "Who will not call to mind Virgil's description of the young and generous Pallas? The haunting beauty of those three lines (*Æneid*, x. 160-162), so simple, so magically picturesque, is not likely to have escaped a reader like Mr. Tennyson:—

*Pallasque sinistro*

*Affixus lateri jam quaerit sidera, opacae*

*Noctis iter, jam quae passus terraque marique,*

'And Pallas clinging close to his (Aeneas's) left side asks now about the stars, the ship's course through the dark night, now about his sufferings by land and sea.'

rapt, carried away; is not from the Lat. *raptus*, but from an

English verb *rap*, to snatch, connected with *rape*, which means originally "haste." But Tennyson probably followed Milton, who must have been thinking of the Lat. *raptus*, when he wrote (*Par. Lost*, iii, 522), "Rapt in a chariot drawn by fiery steeds."

287. It is impossible to fix with any certainty the locality of Arthur's battles. The names given in this and the following lines are taken from the Latin *Historia Brittonum*, by Nennius, who wrote in the eighth or ninth century. The following is a translation of the paragraph in which Nennius gives a list of the battles:—"Then it was that the magnanimous Arthur, with all the kings and military force of Britain, fought against the Saxons. And though there were many more noble than himself, yet he was twelve times chosen their commander, and was as often conqueror. The first battle in which he was engaged was the mouth of the river Glem (or Glein). The second, third, and fourth were on another river, by the Britons called Duglas, in the region Linuis. The sixth on the river Bassas. The seventh in the wood Celidon, which the Britons call Cat Coit Celidon (*i.e.* the wood that is called Celidon). The eighth was near Gunnion Castle, where Arthur bore the image of the Holy Virgin, mother of God, upon his shoulders, and through the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the holy Mary, put the Saxons to flight and pursued them the whole day with great slaughter. The ninth was at the city of Leogis (or Legion), which is called Caer Leon. The tenth was on the banks of the river Trat Treuroit. The eleventh was on the mountain Bregon, which we call Cat Bregon (or in the mount which is called Agned-Cath-Regonion). The twelfth was a most severe contest, when Arthur penetrated to the hill of Badon. In this engagement nine hundred and forty fell by his hand alone, no one but the Lord affording him assistance. In all these engagements the Britons were successful. For no strength can avail against the will of the Almighty."

the violent Glem, variously identified with the Glem in Lincolnshire, the Glen in Northumberland, the Glen in Ayrshire, and the Glevi in Devonshire.

289. Duglas, most probably the river Douglas, which runs past Wigan in Lancashire, and falls into the estuary of the Ribble. Others think it is a stream in Lennox falling into Loch Lomond.

Bassa, perhaps Bashall Brook, which joins the Ribble near Clithero.

291. Celidon the forest. In the margin of one of the ms. of Gildas's *Historia Brittonum*, opposite to the words *in silva Caledonis*, 'the forest of Caledon,' the word *Cornubiae*, 'of Cornwall,' is written. Another ms. margin ascribes the place to Lincolnshire. Other authorities place it on the banks of the Carron in upper-Tweeddale.

292. castle Gurnion, variously spelt *Gunnion*, *Guinion*, and *Gwenion*; perhaps *Caer Gwen*, in *Wedale*, *Stow*.

293. cuirass, breastplate; from Fr. *cuir*, Lat. *corium*, leather, armour for the breast having been originally made of leather.

our Lady's Head. According to Nennius (see note to l. 287, above), Arthur bore the image of the Virgin Mary upon his shoulders. "Geoffrey of Monmouth," writes Mr. H. Littledale in his *Essays on the Idylls*, "says that the picture of the blessed Mary was on Arthur's shield Priwen (= 'the beautiful one'), in order to put him in mind of her, and this is the version generally found in the romances, and followed even by Wordsworth, who mentions (*Eccles. Sonnets*, I. x.) :—

'Arthur, bearing through the stormy field  
The virgin sculptured on his Christian shield.'

Tennyson seems to have been thinking of the famous 'Russian emerald,' said to have been sent originally by Pilate to Tiberius. It is supposed to have the head of Christ carved on it. But the poet has taken the detail of the head on the cuirass from Spenser's Arthur (*Faery Queene*, I. vii. 29, 30) :—

'Athwart his breast a bauldrick brave he ware, [rare :  
That shind, like twinkling stars, with stones most pretious  
And in the midst thereof one pretious stone  
Of wondrous worth, and eke of wondrous might,  
Shapt like a Ladies head, exceeding shone,' etc.

Cf. also Drayton, *Polyolbion*, iv. (of Arthur) :—

"His bauldrick bow adorn'd with stones of wondrous price,  
The sacred virgin's shape he bore for his device."

295. lighten'd as he breathed, flashed and sparkled as his chest rose and fell in breathing.

296. Caerleon. Probably, as Geoffrey of Monmouth says, Caerleon-upon-Usk. In *Pelleas and Ettarre*, 157, a tournament is held at Caerleon, "in the flat field by the shore of Usk," and there too the "gilded parapets" are mentioned.

297. the strong neighings, etc., i.e. the violent inroad of the Saxon forces. The emblem of the Saxons was a White Horse (as that of the Britons was a Dragon), a figure of which was borne on their banner. Cf. *Guinevere*, 15, 16 :—

"the Lords of the White Horse,  
Heathen, the brood by Hengist left ;"

and *The Holy Grail*, 311, 312 :—

"Knights that in twelve great battles splash'd and dyed  
The strong White Horse in his own heathen blood."

299. **Agned-Cathregonion**, a hill in Somersetshire, according to a marginal note in one of the Gildas MSS. According to other authorities, Edinburgh is the place.

300. **Trath Treroit**, variously identified with a stream in Anglesea, with Solway Frith, and with a place on the banks of the Forth, near Stirling.

301, 302. **mount Of Badon**. The battle of *Mons Badonicus* is the only one of Arthur's battles mentioned by Gildas in his Latin History of Britain, and it is the only one which is recognized as definitely historical by modern historians. Thus Green, *Short History of the English People* (chap. i. sec. ii.), writes:—"It is certain that a victory of the Britons at Mount Badon in the year 520 checked the progress of the West Saxons, and was followed by a long pause in their advance." The place of the battle is now generally thought to have been Badbury Hill in Dorsetshire, though it was formerly identified with Bowden Hill, near Lintlithgow.

304. **crying Christ and him**, i.e. their battle-cry was "Christ and Arthur." Cf. Shakspeare, *Henry V.*, III. i. 34:—

"Cry God for Harry, England, and Saint-George."

306. **High on a heap**, etc. Nine hundred and forty of the enemy "fell by his hand alone." See note to l. 287, above.

306, 307. **from spur to plume Red**, etc. Cf. *The Passing of Arthur*, 391:—

"From spur to plume a star of tournament; "

and Shakspeare, *Henry V.*, IV. vi. 6:—

"From helmet to the spur all blood he was."

309-316, **for the King ... leader**. Cf. *Balin and Balan*, 36, 37, where Arthur says of himself that he is

"rather proven in his Paynim wars  
Than famous jousts."

314. **the fire of God**, a divinely-inspired ardour or enthusiasm. Cf. *The Coming of Arthur*, 127, where Lancelot says to Arthur—

"the fire of God  
Descends upon thee in the battle-field."

In the Bible fire is frequently used as a physical symbol of the presence of God. Thus the descent of the Holy Ghost upon the Apostles at the day of Pentecost was in the form of "cloven tongues like as of fire" (*Acts*, ii. 1-4). So at the battle of Actium on the head of Augustus appeared the Julian star, Vergil, *Aeneid*, viii, 679, 680:—

*geminas cui tempora flammæ  
Laeta vomunt, patrumque aperitur vertice sidus,*

which Conington renders :—

The constellation of his sire  
Beams o'er his head, and tongues of fire  
About his temples burn.

Similarly in Homer, *Iliad*, xviii. 206, Pallas crowns Achilles with a golden cloud from which flame darts.

319. **traits of pleasantry**, playful turns, merry talk.

321. **living**, lively, vivacious.

325. **make him cheer**, do him some hospitable service, show him welcome. The expression is often used by Malory.

326. **brake**. Cf. *broke*, l. 278, above. Similarly, for variety's sake, Tennyson uses the double forms *spake* and *spoke*, *sware* and *swore*, *sang* and *sung*, *rang* and *ring*. Cf. "bare" (l. 480), but "overbore" (l. 484), and "bore" (l. 490).

327. **Of manners and of nature**, proceeding partly from conventional politeness, partly from his real feelings.

328. **all was nature**, etc. Elaine thought that his tenderness sprang only from his real feelings, and perhaps arose from love for her.

329. **lived**, vividly appeared.

331, 332. **Divinely ... Behind it**, penetrates with Godlike insight through the outward expression, which is often but a mask to the real nature, and so reads the man's actual character. These lines have been often quoted in connection with G. F. Watts's well-known portrait of Tennyson.

333. **The shape**, etc., a true representation of the man's character and life.

335. **fullest**, i.e. in its most complete manifestation showing all his qualities at their highest.

336. **Dark-splendid**. Lancelot was of dark complexion, with "coal-black curls" (*The Lady of Shalott*, 103), and "night-black hair" (*Balin and Balan*, 503); as Arthur was "fair Beyond the race of Britons and of men" (*The Coming of Arthur*, 329, 330), with "golden head" (*Balin and Balan*, 505), and "light and lustrous curls" (*The Passing of Arthur*, 384).

338 **rathe**, early, the M. E. *rath* (adj.), *rathe* (adv.), 'soon, early,' from which comes our comparative 'rather.' Cf. *In Memoriam*, cx. 2: "The men of ripe and rather years" (i.e. old and young). *Rathe* is used by Chaucer (*Can't. Tales*, 3776): "Why rise ye so rathe?" by Spenser, *The Shepheards Calender*, xii. 98: "Thus is my harvest hastened all to rathe"; by Milton, *Lycidas*, 142: "Bring the rathe primrose that forsaken dies." For other examples of Tennyson's use of old English words, see General Introduction, p. xxii. (e).

338. half-cheated, etc., almost persuading herself that her reason for rising so early was to bid farewell to her dear brother and not to see Lancelot. The word "sweet" represents Elaine's thought, not the poet's.

341. This line [see General Introduction, p. xxv. (g) (4)] is a good example of Tennyson's representative rhythms. Scan

Down the | lóng tów|er-stairs, | hésit|átíng.

Observe how the two trochees in the last two feet, coming after a pause, reproduce to the ear the alternate step and pause of Elaine's descent.

342. Anon, soon afterwards; literally 'in one (instant).'

347. flattering, caressing, fondling.

349. seven men. The numbers *seven* and *ten* are often used indefinitely of any large number: Cf. Malory, vi. 15, "I have loved thee this seven years"; Shakspeare, "a vile thief this seven year"; Milton, *Par. Lost*, II. 171, "seven-fold rage," and *Sir Galahad*, 3, "My strength is as the strength of ten."

352. a sort of sacred fear, a feeling of awe in the presence of holy Innocence at the apparition of the silently gazing maiden.

354. Rapt on, gazing, as if fascinated, upon.

356. her favour. At tournaments a knight often wore in his helmet some small article, generally of dress (as a scarf, a glove, or a sleeve), presented him by his lady-love, to be a token (see ll. 372, 764) of his devotion. It was regarded as a mark of the *favour* in which he was held by the lady by whom it was bestowed. Cf. Shakspeare, *Henry V.* IV. vii. 160: "The glove which I have given him for a favour."

357. She braved, etc. In spite of the violent fluttering of her heart, she forced herself to make the request.

358. Fair lord. *Fair* was a conventional epithet of courtesy, used much as we use *dear* in 'Dear Sir,' 'Dear Madam.'

361, 362. I never yet, etc. Cf. ll. 471, 472, and note.

364. 'Yea, so,' It is so, is it?—well then.

366. That those, etc., that those who are aware of this habit of yours should recognize you.

376. the paler. See note to l. 249.

380. grace, kindness.

382. squire is short for *esquire*, by derivation 'shield-bearer,' from Lat. *scutum*, a shield, through Old Fr. *escuyer*.

384, 385. call you ... In earnest, i.e. in reference to your being actually pale as a lily.

386. Once, twice, and thrice. He kisses her three times.



390. **Her bright hair**, etc. A word-picture reminding us of that more elaborate one in *The Gardener's Daughter*, beginning "One arm aloft—."

394. **Sparkle, until**, etc. For the rhythm, see General Introduction, p. xxiv. (g) (1).

**dipt**, went down. Tennyson uses *dipt* without *below* in *Morte d'Arthur*, 143, "he dipt the surface," i.e. 'he went under the surface.'

396. **lived in fantasy**. This expression, repeated from l. 27, carries us back to that point in the story, after the digression (ll. 28-396) explaining how Elaine came by the shield.

398. **Far o'er**, etc. A very picturesque line, bringing before the eye the undulations of the turfy downs.

399. **a knight**, etc. Cf. Malory, xviii. 12: "a gentle hermit that sometime was a full noble knight and a great lord of possessions; and for great goodness he hath taken him to wilful poverty, and forsaken many lands, and his name is Sir Baudewin of Brittany."

401. **pray'd, labour'd and pray'd**. Cf. the old monkish jingling motto, "*ora et labora*," pray and labour.

406. **The green light**, etc. A good example of Tennyson's keen and accurate observation of nature's rarer effects; see note to l. 12. Cf. *The Princess*, i. 93: "the green gleam of dewy-tassell'd trees."

407. **Lived, was vividly manifest**: cf. l. 335.

408, 409. **And in the meadows ... showers**. Observe the "apt alliteration's artful aid": the dominant letter *s* reproduces the *susurrus* of leaves and raindrops.

409. **noise**. Tennyson, following Shakspeare and Milton, several times uses this word of pleasant sound; sometimes even of *musical* sound, as in *Sir Galahad*, 28, "a noise of hymns." For a similar use of the alliterative sibilant and of the word *noise*, see *The Princess*, Prol., 87, 88:—

"The broad ambrosial aisles of lofty lime  
Made noise with bees and breeze from end to end."

411. **But when ... underground**. A sort of conventional phrase, repeated below, l. 1140, with the slight variation of 'sun' for 'day' and 'brake' for 'broke.' Cf. *Dora*, 76, 77, and 106, 107: "The reapers reap'd, And the sun fell and all the land was dark." See ll. 521, 798, below. Such repetitions are frequent in Homer and Theocritus, and occur also in Spenser and Milton.

412. **red fire**, the ruddy rays of the rising sun.

415. **Lancelot of the Lake**. See note to l. 1393, below.

416, 417. **reverence**, **Dearer**, etc. Tennyson frequently dwells upon the importance of reverence in the making of character. Cf. *Love thou the land*, st. 5:—

“Make knowledge circle with the winds;  
But let her herald, Reverence, fly  
Before her;”

and *In Memoriam*, Introd., 25, 26:—

“Let knowledge grow from more to more,  
But more of reverence in us dwell.”

422. **Pendragon**, literally ‘dragon’s head,’ a title, meaning ‘chief war-leader,’ given to Uther, Arthur’s father. Geoffrey of Monmouth (*Hist. Brit.*, viii. 14-17) tells us that Uther adopted a golden dragon as his emblem, in imitation of a comet which appeared at Winchester darting a portentous “globe of fire in the form of a dragon, out of whose mouth issued forth two rays, one of which extended to Gaul and the other to Ireland.” Cf. *Guinevere*, 394:—

“The Dragon of the great Pendragonship  
That crown’d the state pavilion of the King;”

and see notes to ll. 432, 436, below.

423. **talk mysteriously**. Arthur’s “coming” or birth was a mystery about which there were “many rumours” (see *The Coming of Arthur*, ll. 177 *et seq.*) as there were also about his “passing”: see l. 1250, below, and *Guinevere*, 394, 395:—

“his grave should be a mystery

From all men, like his birth;”

and ll. 671, 672,

“and meet myself

Death, or I know not what mysterious doom.”

425. **I might say**, etc. Cf. Simeon’s words on the infant Christ, Bible, *Luke*, ii. 29, 30: “Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace: for mine eyes have seen thy salvation.” Also the Italian proverb, “Veder Napoli et poi morire,” ‘See Naples and die.’

429. **like a rainbow**. Because of the bright and varied colours of the dresses of the lady spectators: cf. *The Last Tournament*, 125, 126:—

“So dame and damsel glitter’d at the feast  
Variously gay.”

430. **clear-faced**, fair of complexion; also, perhaps, with the added idea of frank openness of expression. Arthur was “fair, Beyond the race of Britons and of men” (*The Coming of Arthur*, 329, 330). See note to l. 336, above.

431. **samite**, a rich silk material interwoven with gold or silver thread; derived from the Gk. *εξάμυρον* (ἐξ, six, and *μυρος*, thread

of the warp), and so, literally, "stuff woven of six threads": cf. *dimity*. Tennyson has "white samite" in *The Coming of Arthur* and elsewhere; "samite ... In colour like the satin-shining palm. On shallows in the windy gleams of March," in *Merlin and Vivien*; "crimson samite," in *The Holy Grail*; and "blackest samite" in this Idyll, l. 1135, below.

432. to his crown, etc. See note to l. 422 above, and cf. *Guinevere*, 589, of Arthur's helmet:—

"To which for crest the golden dragon clung  
Of Britain."

436. Arms for his chair. In *The Last Tournament*, 144, we have mention of Arthur's "double-dragon'd chair."

438. Fled ever, etc., i.e. were carved in designs that twined in and out of the lines of the framework of the chair, so that they seemed to be in perpetual motion.

found, came to, reached.

440. with all ease, without any abrupt, unnatural transition, one design gradually leading the eye on to another.

tender, smoothly fashioned, delicately wrought.

441. canopy, literally, 'a mosquito net,' from the Gk. *κωνώπειον*; hence, a covering above a seat of state.

446. crescent, growing (into fame). Cf. l. 1189, below.

447. overcome, go beyond, excel.

448, 449. save it be ... great. Cf. the saying "The wisest man is he who best knows his own ignorance." Mr. Churton Collins (*Illustrations of Tennyson*) quotes the well-known remark of Socrates in Plato's *Apology*, ix.: οὗτος σοφώτατος ἐστὶν ὅστις ἔγνωκεν ὅτι οὐδένος ἀξίος ἐστὶ τῇ ἀληθείᾳ πρὸς σοφίαν, 'that man is wisest who knows that in reality he is of no worth at all with respect to wisdom.' Cf. also Cowper, *The Task*, vi. 99:—

"Wisdom is humble that he knows no more."

453. held the lists, stood on the defensive.

456. Shock, that a man, etc. For the rhythm see General Introduction, p. xxiv. (g) (1).

457. were left afield, i.e. had not come to see the jousts, but was at his work in the fields.

458. The hard earth shake, etc. Observe how the pause after the second foot, both syllables of which are accented, calls attention to the sudden unexpected tremor produced by the shock of contest, while the two lightly accented syllables of the third foot, followed by two heavily accented syllables, and the alliterative *r* echo the rumble of thunder. Scan thus

The hárd | eárrh sháke, | and a | lów thún|der of árms.

460. *hurld*, dashed. Cf. *Gareth and Lynette*, 1092, "They hurled together." The expression is common in Malory: see the passage quoted below, l. 474.

467. *overdo*, *outdo*. The usual meaning of *overdo* is to 'do too much.'

468-473. *Lo! What is he?* Cf. Malory, xviii. 11: "And then the knights of the Table Round withdrew them aback, after they had gotten their horses as well as they might. 'O mercy,' said Sir Gawaine, 'what knight is yonder that doth so marvellous deeds of arms in that field?' 'I wot what he is,' said King Arthur, 'but as at this time I will not name him.' 'Sir,' said Sir Gawaine, 'I would say it were Sir Launcelot by his riding and his buffets that I see him deal; but ever meseemeth that it should not be he, for that he beareth the red sleeve upon his head, for I wist him never to bear token, at no justs, of lady nor gentlewoman.'"

474-498. *a fury seized*, etc. Cf. Malory, xviii. 11: "So these nine knights of Sir Launcelot's kin thrust in mightily, for they were all noble knights. And they, of great hate and despite that they had unto him, thought to rebuke that noble knight Sir Launcelot and Sir Lavaine. And so they came hurtling together and smote down many knights of Northgalis and Northumberland. And when Sir Launcelot saw them fare so, he gat a spear in his hand, and there encountered with him all at once Sir Bors, Sir Ector, and Sir Lionel, and all they three smote him at once with their spears. And by misfortune Sir Bors smote Sir Launcelot through the shield into the side, and the spear brake and the spear left still in his side. When Sir Lavaine saw his master lie on the ground, he ran to the King of the Scots and smote him to the earth and by great force he took his horse and brought him to Sir Launcelot, and maugre them all he made him to mount upon that horse . . . And then afterward he (Launcelot) hurled in the thickest press of them all and did there the marvelloudest deeds of arms that ever man saw or heard speak of; and ever Sir Lavaine the good knight with him. And there Sir Launcelot with his sword smote and pulled down, as the French book maketh mention, more than thirty knights, and the most part were of the Table Round. And Sir Lavaine did full well that day, for he smote down ten knights of the Table Round."

475. *fiery family*. Notice the assonance, combining with 'fury' in the preceding line. See General Introduction, p. xxvi. (*h*).

476. *a glory one with theirs*. Cf. *The Last Tournament*, 648, 649:—

"For Lancelot's kith and kin so worship him  
That ill to him is ill to them."

480-482. as a wild wave ... skies. In a letter written in 1882 to Mr. S. E. Dawson, author of *A Study of the Princess*, Tennyson writes: "There was a period of my life, when, as an artist, Turner, for example, takes rough sketches of landscapes, etc., in order to work them eventually into some great picture, so I was in the habit of chronicling, in four or five words or more, whatever might strike me as picturesque in Nature. I never put these down, and many a line has gone away on the north wind, but some remain, e.g. in the 'Idylls of the King':—

'With all

Its stormy crests that smoke against the skies.'

Suggestion: A storm which came upon us in the middle of the North Sea." Homer has used this simile of a wave falling upon a ship to describe a battle charge twice in the *Iliad*, xv. 381-384 and 624.

477. couch'd their spears, i.e. placed the butt end of the spears in the rest, or socket behind the saddle on the right hand side, so as to bring the point into the position for attack. 'Couch' is from Lat. *collocare* (con-, together, and *locare*, to place), through the Old Fr. *colcher*, *coucher*.

prick'd, spurred. This line repeats in different phraseology the "Set lance in rest, strike spur" of l. 454, above.

481. Green-glimmering, etc. The actual summit is white with foam, but just below, the storm-wave is green, with a light shining through it. For the initial alliteration in 'green-glimmering' see note to l. 89, above.

482. smoke against the skies. A wonderfully vivid metaphor. The fine spray blown from the crests of the waves looks like smoke against the background of the sky.

488. Pierc'd thro' ... snapt, and remain'd. Observe how the break in the fourth foot, marked by the pause after its first syllable 'snapt,' which is accented, calls attention to the sudden breaking of the spear head. Scan:—

Piérced thro' | his síde, | and thére | snápt, and | remáin'd.

489. well and worshipfully. So Malory, xviii. 13: "And his fellow (Lavaine) did right well and worshipfully." 'Worshipfully' means 'nobly.'

493. thought to do, determined to fight.

494. lustily holpen, vigorously helped. For Tennyson's fondness for Saxon words, see General Introduction, p. xix. (d).

498. to the barrier, to the palisade surrounding the arena.

then the trumpets blew. Cf. Malory, xviii. 12: "And then the king blew into lodging, and the prize was given by the heralds unto the knight with the white (i.e. blank) shield, that bare the red sleeve."

502, 503. **Diamond me No diamonds**, etc., a form of emphatic remonstrance—"Do not talk to me about diamonds." The phraseology is common in literature: cf. Shakspeare, *Richard II.* ii. iii. 87: Grace me no grace nor uncle me no uncle;" and Scott, *Ivanhoe*, cap. xx.: "Clerk me no clerks."

506-516. **He spoke, and vanish'd.** Cf. Malory, xviii. 12: "And therewithal he groaned piteously, and rode a great gallop away-ward from them, until he came under a wood side; and when he saw that he was from the field nigh a mile, that he was sure he might not be seen, then he said with a high voice, 'O gentle knight, Sir Lavaine, help me that this truncheon were out of my side, for it sticketh so sore that it nigh slayeth me.' 'O mine own Lord,' said Sir Lavaine, 'I would fain do that might please you, but I dread me sore and I draw out the truncheon that ye shall be in peril of death.' 'I charge you,' said Sir Launcelot, 'as ye love me, draw it out.' And therewithal he descended from his horse, and right so did Sir Lavaine, and forthwith Sir Lavaine drew the truncheon out of his side. And he gave a great shriek and a marvellous grisly groan, and his blood brast out nigh a pint at once, and at last he sank down and so swooned pale and deadly."

511. **I dread me.** 'Me' is here in the dative case. Such reflexive datives with intransitive verbs were very common in Old English, as in *Piers Ploughman*, Prol. 7, "I ... went me to reste." For other examples see Maetzner, *Eng. Gram.*, vol. ii., pp. 64, 65. Cf. "fare thee well," "he hied him home."

516. **For the pure pain**, simply on account of the pain: for 'pure' in this sense cf. the phrase 'pure and simple.'

521. **noise of falling showers**, etc. For the repetition see ll. 408, 409, above, and cf. note to l. 409.

524. **knights of utmost North and West.** Malory, xviii. 10, mentions among them "the King of Northumberland and the King of North Wales."

525. **marches**, border lands, often the battle grounds of neighbouring tribes, and therefore left uncultivated.

526. **Pendragon.** See note to l. 422, above.

530-534. **Heaven hinder**, etc. Cf. Malory, xviii. 13: "'Alas,' said Arthur, 'how may this be? is he so hurt? What is his name?'" said King Arthur. 'Truly,' said they all, 'we know not his name, nor from whence he came, nor whither he would.' 'Alas,' said the king, 'these be to me the worst tidings that came to me this seven year: for I would not for all the lands I hold to know and wit it were so that the noble knight were slain.' 'Know ye him?' said they all. 'As for that,' said King Arthur, 'whether I know him or not, ye shall not know what man he is, but almighty Jesu send me good tidings of him.' And so said

they all." Malory has previously said that King Arthur knew all along that the knight was Sir Lancelot, having "espied him as he did walk in a garden beside the castle at Astolat."

534. pass, pass out of sight.

534, 535. Wherefore, rise, etc. Malory (xviii. 13) makes Gawaine undertake the quest of Lancelot voluntarily, and not as here unwillingly, and only at the king's command. (See l. 558, below.

545. bring us, i.e. bring us news. Cf. Shakspeare, *Hamlet*, v. ii. 205: "who brings back to him that you attend him"; and *Ant. and Cleopatra*, iv. xiii. 10: "bring me how he takes my death."

548. To which it made, etc., i.e. it glittered and quivered in the centre of the flower as the heart throbs in the breast. Mr. Little-dale (*Essays on the Idylls*) quotes *Maud*, i. xiv. 2:—

"Maud's own little oak room  
(Which Maud, like a precious stone  
Set in the heart of the carven gloom,  
Lights with herself, etc.)."

551. a Prince, etc. Gawain's character is gradually and consistently developed in the *Idylls*. At first we have a bright, frank, impulsive boy: see *The Coming of Arthur*, 319-321:—

"And Gawain went; and breaking into song  
Sprang out, and follow'd by his flying hair  
Ran like a colt, and leapt at all he saw."

Later (in *Gareth and Lynette*) he appears as a knight of brilliant achievements, for Gareth saw on the wall of Arthur's hall

"The shield of Gawain blazon'd rich and bright,"

in token that he had done more than one "noble deed." Here (in *Lancelot and Elaine*) we find the first hint of the taint of disloyalty; and below (l. 635) we are told that his famed courtesy, which gave him his surname of 'The Courteous,' was

"Courtesy with a touch of traitor in it."

In *The Holy Grail* his want of lofty aim and serious purpose is contrasted with his noisy impulsiveness, and we read that when the knights took the oath to ride a twelvemonth and a day in quest of the Grail, "Gawain swore, and louder than the rest," but that soon, growing much awearied of the quest, he renounced it and spent the year in dalliance; and how subsequently in "foolish words—A reckless and irreverent knight was he"—he ridiculed all such lofty enterprises. And, finally, in *Pelleas and Ettarre*, although at first there flashed through Gawain's heart

"The fire of honour and all noble deeds,"

all noble impulse is dissipated by the first shock with sensual

temptation. Although Pelleas already knows him for the one "whom men call light-of-love," he is induced to trust to his pledged troth, only to find himself treacherously betrayed :—

"Alas that ever knight should be so false."

It is only after Gawain's death that his spirit discovers and mourns the worthlessness of those earthly delights which in his lifetime he had put above loyalty and duty. We read in *The Passing of Arthur* (29-32), how

"There came on Arthur sleeping, Gawain kill'd  
In Lancelot's war, the ghost of Gawain blown  
Along a wandering wind, and past his ear  
Went shrilling, 'Hollow, hollow, all delight.'"

The gradual lowering of Gawain's character is symbolic of that moral degradation of the whole order of the Round Table which spoiled the purpose of Arthur's life. The older chroniclers, before Malory, give Gawain a much nobler character. Geoffrey of Monmouth gives him the first place in the ranks of Arthur's army, his prowess obscuring that of Arthur himself. In many of the verse romances he is represented as the mirror of knighthood and courtesy. It is not till the later prose romances and the introduction of the spiritual Grail element that Gawain is deposed from this pride of place: in the *Percivale* he is reserved for "the rôle of dreadful example."

552. In the mid might, etc., in the height and flower of his youthful vigour.

554, 555. Tristram, and Geraint And Gareth. These knights are each the chief personage in an Idyll: Tristram in *The Last Tournament*, Geraint in *The Marriage of Geraint* (and its sequel *Geraint and Enid*), and Gareth in *Gareth and Lynette*. The following list gives the names of all the knights of the Round Table whose deeds are told in the *Idylls of the King* :—

Lancelot,	'His warrior whom he lov'd And honour'd most.'
Bedivere,	'First made and latest left of all the knights.'
Gawain,	'A reckless and irreverent knight was he.'
Modred,	'Struck for the throne, and striking found his doom.'
Gareth,	'Underwent The sooty yoke of kitchen vassalage.'
Kay, . .	'No mellow master of the meats and drinks.'
Geraint,	'A tributary prince of Devon;' (married to Enid.)
Balin, }	'We two were born together, and we die Together by one doom.'
Balan, }	
Percival,	'Whom Arthur and his knighthood call'd the Pure.'
Galahad,	'But I, Sir Arthur, saw the Holy Grail.'
Bors, . .	'A square-set man and honest;' (of Lancelot's kin.)
Pelleas, .	'Of the Isles;' (enamoured of Etarre.)
Tristram,	'Of the Woods;' (slain by Mark, Isolt's husband.)

There were also Ulfius, Brastias, Valence, and Sagamore.



555. **And Gareth.** The first edition (1859) reads "And Lamorak."

556. **Sir Modred's brother, etc.** Lot, King of Orkney, was married to Bellicent, Arthur's reputed sister, and Lot's sons, Modred, Gawain, and Gareth, are sometimes called Arthur's nephews, although Arthur, in *Guinevere*, 669, disclaims any relationship with Modred:—

"the man they call  
My sister's son—no kin of mine."

In *Gareth and Lynette*, 75, 76, we read of Lot that

"traitor to the King  
He fought against him in the Barons' wars."

Cf. *Balin and Balan*, 2. Modred inherited a full share of his father's disloyalty, as we read in *The Passing of Arthur*, and, like his father before him, fought against Arthur (*Guinevere*, 670, 671) in league

"With Lords of the White Horse, heathen, and knights  
Traitors—"

Gawain is less of a traitor in his relations to Arthur than Modred, but he does not escape the inborn taint. Gareth alone of the brothers is a true man, a knight "to the King's best wish."

562. **dark, gloomy, melancholy.**

567. **tarriance.** This form is used twice by Shakspeare: *Two Gent. of Verona*, II. vii. 90, "I am impatient of my tarriance"; and *Pass. Pilgrim*, 74, "A longing tarriance for Adonis made."

576. **went down ... touch.** Cf. *Gareth and Lynette*, 1191-1193:—

"When they closed—in a moment—at a touch  
Of that skill'd spear, the wonder of the world—  
Went sliding down."

For the repetition (see ll. 148-150, above), cf. note to l. 411, above.

583. "**Our true Arthur,**" etc. These were really *Guinevere's* words, not *Lancelot's*; see ll. 151-153, above.

591. **fantastical, whimsical, full of romantic fancies.**

592. **fine, delicate, sensitive.**

large, big, bulky.

601. **broider'd.** See note to l. 8, above.

603. **choked.** A spasm in the throat, the result of her emotion, prevented further speech. Similarly, l. 619, below, Elaine "catches her breath" at the ill news of Lancelot.

609. **flash'd, burst.**

615. *enamell'd*. Derived from Fr. *en*, 'upon,' and *amaile*, *amel*, which is from the same root as the English verb 'to smelt.' We find *amel* used as a verb by Chapman:—

"Enlightened with stars  
And richly ameled."

620. *Thro' her own side*, etc. She felt a sudden stab in her side, as if the spear that had wounded Lancelot had sympathetically pierced her too.

634. *Accorded*, agreed.

635. *Courtesy ... traitor in it*. See note to l. 551, above.

636. *cast his eyes*, etc. In Malory Gawain appears as a loyal friend to Lancelot. His treacherous attempt here depicted to win Elaine's affection from him whom he understood to be her lover, and his subsequent suggestion that their acquaintance might, amid the easy manners of the court, grow into a less innocent intimacy, illustrate the increasing corruption of the Round Table and the spreading of the canker which originated in Lancelot's 'faith unfaithful.' 'Cast his eyes on,' is a Biblical expression: cf. *Genesis*, xxxix. 7.

639. *turn'd*, fashioned, moulded.

642. *play upon her*. See note to l. 208, above.

643. *free flashes*, outbursts of sparkling wit and badinage, unrestrained by conventionality or bashfulness.

*from a height*, etc., i.e. from one moving in a sphere more exalted than her own.

653. *hern*, a contraction of 'heron': the shorter form is found in Wright's *Vocabulary* and in the *Promptum Parvulorum*, and is always used by Tennyson.

653, 654. *went To all the winds*, flew aimlessly in all directions.

657. *an*. See note to l. 218, above.

659. *Sir Lancelot's azure lions*, etc. So in *Gareth and Lynette*, 1186, Lancelot covers his "blue shield lions" when he wishes to travel *incognito*. In *The Lady of Shalott*, 78, 79, his device is a red-cross knight kneeling to a lady.

660. *Ramp*, which means literally 'to climb,' is the technical heraldic term (generally found in the form *rampant*) of animals in a posture of attack, upright on the hind feet. Cf. *Gareth and Lynette*, 1273, where Gareth, clutching Lancelot's shield says, "Ramp, ye lance-splintering lions."

*field*, the heraldic term for the surface of the shield forming the background for the blazoned arms.

*smote his thigh*. A common expression in Homer's *Iliad* as in xii. 162, *Δὴ ῥα τὸτ' ἔμωξέν τε καὶ ὦ πεπληγέτο μηρῷ*, 'Then he

groaned and smote his two thighs,' where, however, the action expresses dismay, rather than, as here, surprise.

661. *that true man.* 'True' seems to mean 'loyal and constant' in his love, as in the 'doleful complaint' made before Lancelot's death by his brother Sir Ector in Malory, xxi. 13, where he calls him "the truest friend to thy lover that ever bestrode horse."

664. *And if I dream'd, etc.,* I ask your pardon if my idea that you love Lancelot is a mere piece of imagination on my part and not a fact. But now I have explained myself; so tell me plainly if it is so, and save my throwing away my love on one who cannot return it.

668. *all my fellowship, all the companions that I have had.*

670. *Wish'd it had been my mother, sc. that I was talking with.* There is something very pathetic in this longing of the motherless girl for a mother to whom she could talk of such a subject with the certainty of understanding sympathy. As the old Earl says in *Geraint and Enid*, 510, 511:—

"Mother, a maiden is a tender thing,  
And best by her that bore her understood."

673. *But if I know, etc.,* but if the notion I hold of what true love is, be a correct one, then I love him or no one. This indirect and hesitating avowal is what we should expect from the simple and modest Elaine of this Idyll. In Malory's account (xviii. 14) she is less reticent: "Said Sir Gawaine, 'Is that knight that owneth this shield your love?' 'Yea, truly,' said she, 'my love he is: God would I were his love.'"

For the ringing of the changes on the verb *know* here (ll. 665, 667, 671-674, 676), and the repetition of *love* (ll. 688-690, below), cf. note to L. 163.

675. *by God's death, by the death of Christ (the God-man)—*a common mediæval oath, often contracted into '*sdeath*.'

677. *So be it, i.e.* we need not discuss the matter.

678. *lifted her fair face, i.e.* raised her head proudly erect in indignation at Gawain's insinuation against Lancelot.

680. *One ... grace,* accord me hearing for one minute, an invaluable boon.

683. *like enow, likely enough.* Gawain judges others by his own low standard. 'Enow' was originally a plural form of the indefinite pronoun, 'enough,' but Tennyson uses it throughout the *Idylls* without distinction of number for 'enough,' pronoun and adverb.

686. *let me leave, etc.* The leaving of the diamond with Elaine, and the king's subsequent wrath with Gawain, are in-

cidents introduced into the story by Tennyson; they are not found in Malory's account.

691. A diamond is a diamond, a diamond has a value of its own.

696. We two ... other. See note to l. 636, above.

700. A true-love ballad, a song of true love, of which Gawain, whom men called "light-of-love" (see note to l. 551, above), could really know very little.

707. our courtesy, the courtesy which is one of the rules of our Round Table.

is the truest law, and so overrides the law of obedience to the king. Notice the sound-play, *courtesy*, *courteous* (l. 711), *courtesy* (l. 713), and cf. note to l. 163, above. 'That other' is similarly played upon in ll. 752-754, below.

714. parted, departed. The two words, *part* and *depart*, have exchanged meanings; *part*, which now means *separate*, formerly meant *go away*, while *depart*, which now means *go away*, formerly meant *separate*. In the Marriage Service of the Church of England, the phrase, "till death us *do part*," is a modern substitution for the original, "till death us depart," i.e. "till death separate us."

715. For twenty strokes, etc., i.e. while his heart beat twenty times, for twenty seconds or so.

717. shook his hair, tossed his head. Gawain's long hair is perhaps an indication of his foppish habits. As a boy he wore his hair long; cf. *The Coming of Arthur*, 320, quoted in note to l. 551, above. Lancelot, however, had "curls" that "From underneath his helmet flow'd" (*The Lady of Shalott*, 603).

722. read, scanned, studied.

727. But sorrowing, etc., by only expressing her sorrow that Lancelot should have chosen so lowly a maiden for his love.

728. Marr'd her friend's aim, spoil the effect of the old gossip's news by receiving it coldly and without emotion.

730. a nine-days' wonder. The old proverb says, "A wonder lasts but nine days." Cf. Shakspeare, 3 *Henry VI.* III. ii. 113, 114:—

"Glow. That would be a ten days' wonder at the least.

Clar. That 's a day longer than a wonder lasts;"

and *As You Like It*, III. ii. 184: "I was seven of the nine days out of the wonder." The construction is, 'the tale flared (like) fire in stubble, a nine-days' wonder.'

732. to drink, etc. The union of two such names in one toast would not in the days of chivalry suggest any notion of im-

proper intimacy between the personages, as Lancelot himself tells the queen in ll. 110-116, above.

735. *With lips severely placid*, etc., setting her lips firmly, so as to show no quiver of passion in them.

*felt the knot*, etc., a curiously exact description of the effects of strong, indignant grief, sternly repressed.

737. *Crush'd the wild passion*, etc. Malory, xviii. 2, speaking of a former quarrel between the queen and Lancelot, says, "So when Sir Launcelot was departed, the queen made no manner of sorrow in shewing, to none of his blood, nor to none other; but wit ye well, inwardly as the book saith, she took great thought; but she bare it out with a proud countenance, as though she felt nothing."

742. *one-day-seen*. Cf. l. 1160, below, "nine-years-fought-for."

745. *you call me wilful*. Cf. l. 205, above.

761. *The gentler-born ... the more bound*. Cf. the proverb, *noblesse oblige*, 'gentle birth binds' (i.e. to gentle deeds). For this *the*, see note l. 249, above.

762. *serviceable*, occurs twice in Milton: *Nativity Ode*, 244:—

"Bright harness angels sit in order serviceable;"

and *Par. Regained*, i. 421:—

"Thou art serviceable to Heaven's king."

Cf. *The Marriage of Geraint*, 393:—

"And seeing her so sweet and serviceable."

764. *their tokens*. See note to l. 356, above.

767. *fain*, glad. The word is from an old Teutonic base, *fag-*, to fit, to suit. "The sense seems to have been originally 'fixed'; hence 'suited,' 'satisfied,' 'content'" (Skeat). The word is generally used in modern English to imply acceptance of the less disagreeable of two alternatives.

769-770. *And sure ... a queen's*. He is answering to himself a fear that has arisen in his mind lest the humble Elaine should be attracted by the great Sir Lancelot.

778. *you must die*, a presage of her actual doom.

784. *the long backs*, etc., repeated from l. 398, above. See note to l. 411, above.

787. *Making a roan horse*, etc. Cf. Malory, xvii. 15: "By fortune Sir Lavaine was ridden to play him, to enchain his horse."

*curvet*, prance with all four legs off the ground at the same time; from *curve*, to bend (the body).

788. *a field of flowers*. The different seasons of the year at which the events of the different Idylls took place are fixed in each Idyll by some incidental descriptive touch. This is one

of the "Summer Idylls." See ll. 1133, 1134, below, "the field that shone Full summer"; l. 1226, and note; and *Introduction to the Idylls*, pp. xlii.-xliv.

794. **in his moods**, in one of the gloomy fits that often seized him.

795. **strange-statued**, another instance of the poet's alliterative double epithets; see note to l. 89, above.

796. **Where Arthur's wars**, etc. See the description of this gate in *Gareth and Lynette*, 209-226 :—

" And there was no gate like it under heaven.  
For barefoot on the keystone, which was lined  
And rippled like an ever-fleeting wave,  
The Lady of the Lake stood : all her dress  
Wept from her sides as water flowing away ;  
But like the Cross her great and goodly arms  
Stretcht under all the cornice and upheld ;  
And drops of water fell from either hand ;  
And down from one a sword was hung, from one  
A censer, either worn with wind and storm ;  
And o'er her breast floated the sacred fish ;  
And in the space to left of her and right  
Were Arthur's wars in weird devices done,  
New things and old co-twisted, as if Time  
Were nothing, so inveterately, that men  
Were giddy gazing there ; and over all  
High on the top were those three Queens, the friends  
Of Arthur, who should help him at his need."

In *The Holy Grail*, 358, 359, the gate is called

" the Gate of the three Queens,  
Where Arthur's wars are rendered mystically."

**render'd**, represented.

**mystically**, so as to teach by mysterious symbols some great truth.

807. **battle-writhen**, with muscles knotted and twisted by constant wielding of sword and spear.

808. **wolfskin**, which formed a coverlet for the bed.

810. **unsleek, unshorn**. Cf. *The Talking Oak*, 41, 42 :—

" Old summers, when the monk was fat,  
And, issuing shorn and sleek," etc.

811. **Gaunt**, etc., repeated from l. 759, above. See note to l. 411, above.

817. Notice how the trochee ("glistē'n'd") in the second foot, with the pause after it, emphasizes the action indicated.

825. **slipt like water.** Cf. the use of the Lat. *defluere*, 'to flow down,' in the sense of 'to slip or sink down,' as in Virgil, *Aeneid*, xi. 501, *ad terram defluxit*, "slipped to the ground."

832. **her simple face.** The guileless Elaine had no art to check the tell-tale blush that disclosed the secret of her love. See l. 859, below.

835. **did not love the colour, did not like Elaine's blushing,** showing, as it did, that she loved him.

836. **not regarded,** for 'did not regard' or 'regarded not.' The usage occurs several times in Shakspeare, as in *Tempest*, v. i. 38, "Whereof the ewe not bites"; it is common also in earlier authors.

839. **weirdly-sculptur'd gates.** See l. 796, below, and note.

840. Another repetition; see ll. 797, 886, and note to l. 411. The recurrence of the phrases in this line and in l. 842 calls attention to the regular succession of her journeys to and fro. *Dim* and *rich* are used by the poet as 'permanent epithets' of the city of Camelot: cf. *The Holy Grail*, 228, 342, etc. See note to l. 229.

844. **In either twilight,** in the dusk of early morning and of evening. The phrase occurs also in *Edwin Morris*, 37, "In either twilight, and the day between."

848. **whole, healed;** cf. note to l. 93, above.

849. **Brain-feverous.** Tennyson uses 'feverous' rather than the common 'feverish' also in *Enoch Arden*, 230, and in *Aylmer's Field*, 701. The word occurs four times in Shakspeare. See General Introduction, p. xvii. (*d*).

851. **forbore him,** was patient with him. 'Forbear' is often used by Shakspeare as a transitive verb, but generally in the sense of 'abstain from' or 'let alone,' as in *As You Like It*, ii. vii. 127, "Forbear your good a while," and 2 *Henry IV.* iv. v. 110, "Canst thou not forbear me half an hour." Cf. *Guinevere*, 329, "Forbore his own advantage," i.e. 'gave up, did not claim.'

854. **And never woman, etc.** Cf. Malory, xviii. 15, "So this maiden Elaine never went from Sir Launcelot, but watched him day and night, and did such attendance to him that the French book saith there was never woman did more kindlier for man than she."

**man's first fall,** i.e. the Fall of Adam, in the Garden of Eden.

857. **simples, healing herbs.** Every plant was supposed to possess certain medicinal properties of its own, and so, when used in its *simple*, or uncompounded state, to be a specific cure for some disease.

862. **held her tenderly, treated her with gentle kindness.**

864. love their best, etc., i.e. love their best love, when their love is strongest and most intimate. Cf. *Aylmer's Field*, 66 and 70, "eyes that ... beam'd ... Their best and brightest."

871, 872. His honour ... falsely true. Lines often quoted as a sample of Tennyson's strength and concentration of style. For a similar example of oxymoron, see *The Coming of Arthur*, 194: "So loathed the bright dishonour of his love"; and for "faith unfaithful," *Maud*, i. ii. 6, "Faultily faultless," and *The Defence of Lucknow*, vi., "the pitiful-pitiless knife." Mr. Churton Collins (*Illustrations of Tennyson*) quotes Andocides, εισηγησαμένω μὲν Εὐφίλῃτῳ πίστιν τῶν ἐν ἀνθρώποις ἀπιστοτάτην ἡναντιώθη, 'when Euphiletus proposed a most unwarrantable warranty I opposed him'; but πίστιν ἀπιστοτάτην, meaning 'an oath or pledge that no one ought to give or to receive,' is only superficially like 'faith unfaithful,' which here implies 'faith to Guinevere involving faithlessness to Arthur.'

875. These, as but ... live. Cf. Milton, *Par. Lost*, iv. 96, 97:—

"Ease would recant  
Vows made in pain as violent and void."

877. One face, one particular face, viz., Guinevere's.

878. Making a treacherous quiet, soothing his thoughts into a calm soon to be broken by the rising gusts of passion.

880. that ghostly grace, that visionary image of the beautiful face.

883. What the rough sickness meant. See ll. 849, 850, above.

885. ere her time, i.e. before the usual hour for quitting Lancelot.

890. passage, musical passage, strain.

895. And now to right, etc. Cf. Virgil, *Æneid*, iv. 690 (of the love-sick Dido):—

Ter sese attollens cubitoque annixa levavit,  
Ter revoluta toro est.

'Thrice leaning on her elbow she raised herself up, thrice she turned round on the couch.'

898. like a burthen, like the refrain of a song repeated after each verse. This *burthen*, more properly spelt *burden*, is from Fr. *bourdon*, the drone of a humming bee, and hence that of a bag-pipe, or of the bass in music. Cf. *Enoch Arden*, 792-794:—

"Beating it in upon his weary brain,  
As tho' it were the burthen of a song,  
Not to tell her, never to let her know."

904. 'If I be loved, etc.,' i.e. 'these fine robes of mine are not unsuited for my wear, whether Lancelot accepts or refuses my love: if he loves me, they will be a fitting symbol of my joy; if



he loves me not, they will be emblems of my doom, like the flowers which decorate a victim led to sacrifice.' In ancient sacrifices the victim's head was wreathed with garlands, and its horns were often gilded.

910, 911. **I make My will of yours**, your wishes shall be mine, I will do exactly as you desire.

912. **what I will I can**, I have power to carry out any wish that I determine upon.

913. **like a ghost**, *i.e.* pale as a ghost.

923. **that I live**, etc., it is owing to your care that I am alive and can hear what you have to say: see l. 858, above.

929. **Had I chosen to wed**. Lancelot's objections to matrimony are given by Malory (vi. 10): "But to bee a wedded man I think never to be, for if I were, then should I be bound to tarry with my wife, and leave armes and turnaments, battells and adventures."

936. **All ear and eye**, that is always suspiciously spying and eavesdropping.

937. **To interpret ear and eye**. The world in its stupidity puts an evil construction on what it hears and sees.

938. **To blare**, to trumpet forth; cf. *blaze*, 'to proclaim,' both words being from the same root as *blow*.

939. **quit**, requite, repay. Cf. Malory, xviii. 19, "for then I rewarded to your father and your brother full evil for their great goodness."

945. **of mine own self**, by the experience of my own past life.

953. **to the half my realm**. Cf. Bible. *Mark*, vi. 23, where Herod promises Herodias's daughter, "Whatsoever thou shalt ask of me, I will give it thee, unto the half of my kingdom."

**beyond the seas**. Banwicke, Lancelot's hereditary domain, was, according to the versions of the romance of *Merlin*, in "Lesser Britany." Malory, xx. 18, writes "and so they shipped at Cardiff and sailed unto Beuwicke. Some men call it Bayonne, and some men call it Beaume, where the wine of Beaume is."

954. **So that would**, etc. See note to l. 222, above.

955. **my blood**, my blood-relation, my kinswoman.

963. **black walls of yew**, close-clipped thick hedges of yew trees. Tennyson often mentions the gloom and darkness of yew foliage, as in *In Memoriam*, ii. 12, and xxxix. 4, and 11, 12.

964. **a flash**. He refers to Lancelot's phrase "love's first flash in youth," l. 964, above.

965. **I fear me**. See note to l. 511, above.

969. That were against me, that would be doing a violence to my nature.

977. tact of love, love's instinct.

986. pictured, covered with tapestry embroidered with figures, etc.

993, 994. the owls Wailing, etc. So in Virgil, *Æneid*, iv. 462, when Dido is on the eve of being deserted by Æneas, among the portents of death she hears at night the voice of her dead husband summoning her, and the lonely owl wailing:—

“Solaque culminibus ferali carmine bubo

Sape queri et longas in fletum ducere voces”;

‘and on the roof the lonely owl would often complain in funeral strains and prolong its lingering cry into a wail.’

994. had power upon her. Cf. *Mariana*, 73-77:—

“The sparrow’s chirrup on the roof,

The slow clock ticking, and the sound,

Which to the wooing wind aloof

The poplar made, did all confound

Her sense.”

995. sallow-rifted glooms, dusk broken by patches of pallid light.

1000. Sweet in true love, etc. In several of the Idylls we have songs of this form, consisting of stanzas of three lines of the same length as the narrative part of the poem: the first two lines of each stanza rhyme together, while the final lines of all the stanzas either rhyme with each other or end in the same word. Thus in *The Coming of Arthur* we have the knight’s song, “Blow, trumpet, for the world is white with May”; in *Gareth and Lynette*, Lynette’s song, “O morning star that smilest in the blue”; in *The Marriage of Geraint*, Enid’s song, “Turn, Fortune, turn thy wheel, and lower the proud”; in *Merlin and Vivien*, Vivien’s song, “In Love, if Love be Love, if Love be ours”; and in *Guinevere*, the little maid’s song, “Late, late, so late! and dark the night and chill.” In *Balin and Balan*, in Vivien’s song, “The fire of heaven has killed the barren cold,” the stanzas are four-lined, and five-lined in the ‘lay’ in *Pelleas and Etarre*.

1003. bitter death must be, death must be bitter.

1010. who calls. Cf. l. 993, above.

1015. the Phantom of the house. Brand, *Popular Antiquities*, writes, “Grose tells us that, besides general notices of death, many families have particular warnings or notices; some by the appearance of a bird, and others by the figure of a tall woman, dressed all in white, who goes shrieking about the house. This

apparition is common in Ireland, where it is called Benshea, and the Shrieking Woman." Cf. Moore, *Irish Melodies*, ii. :—

"How oft has the Benshee cried !  
How oft has death untied  
Bright links that glory wove,  
Sweet bonds entwined by love !"

Similarly, in Scotland, the water-sprite (see Scott, *Rosabelle*, 10) or water-wraith "shrieks before a death": cf. Logan, *The Braes of Yarrow* :—

"Thrice did the water-wraith ascend  
And give a doleful groan through Yarrow";

and Campbell, *Lord Ullin's Daughter* :—

"By this the storm grew loud apace,  
The water-wraith was shrieking."

1019. **shrilling**. Tennyson frequently uses *shrill* as a verb, either active, as here, or neuter: cf. *The Passing of Arthur*, 34, 42; *The Talking Oak*, 68; *Enoch Arden*, 175; *Demeter and Persephone*, 60.

1026. **still**, silent.

1029. **when we dwelt**, etc. Cf. ll. 226, 227, above.

1049. **a thousand farewells**. See l. 692, above.

1059. **to heave**, to pant. His bosom heaved with passion.

1061. **an I meet**. See note to l. 657, above.

1064. **Give me**, etc. An instance of the imperative mood used to express a supposition.

1072. **break the passion**, cure her of her love for Lancelot.

1080. **never yet**, etc. Mr. Churton Collins (*Illustrations of Tennyson*) quotes Æschylus, *Agamemnon*, 908, ὁ δ' ἀφθόνητός γ' οὐκ ἐπίζηλος πέλει, 'he who is not an object of envy is not an object of emulation.'

1084. **pass**, die. Cf. *Dora*, 147, "he turned his face and passed," and "passing bell," the bell of a church tolled when a member of the congregation has just died, to invite the prayers of the parishioners for the repose of the departed soul, and to scare evil spirits.

1092. **the ghostly man**, the spiritual guide, the priest. Malory, xviii. 19, has, "Then her ghostly father bade her leave such thoughts." 'Ghostly' in this sense is frequently used by Shakespeare; see *Romeo and Juliet*, III. iii. 49, "a divine, a ghostly confessor." Cf. The Book of Common Prayer, *Communion Service*, "that by the ministry of God's holy Word he may receive the benefit of absolution, together with ghostly counsel and advice."

1093. **shrive me clean**, receive my confession of sins, and grant me absolution. *Shrive* is from the same root as Lat. *scribere*, 'to

write,' and meant originally 'to prescribe, or impose, a penance for sin,' and hence to give absolution or pardon.

1101. **Then he wrote**, etc. Compare the account in Malory, xviii. 19: "And when the letter was written word by word as she devised, then she prayed her father that she might be watched until she were dead ... And while my body is hot, let this letter be put into my right hand, and my hand be bound fast with the letter until I be cold, and let me be put in a fair bed, with all the richest clothes that I have about me, and so let my bed and all my richest clothes be laid with me in a chariot unto the next place where the Thames is, and there let me be put within a barget, and but one man with me, such as ye trust to steer me thither, and that my barget be covered with black samite over and over."

1124. **they deem'd**, etc., they thought that her belief that she was going to die was merely fanciful, and not due to any actual sickness of the body.

1129. **So that day**, etc. Observe the Dantesque reticence of this line. No elaborate description could portray their grief so strikingly as these few simple monosyllables.

**dole**, grief, from the same root as the Lat. *dolor*: it is the word used by Malory: "Then her father and her brother made great dole."

1130. **But when**, etc. Cf. 411, above.

1131. **with bent brows**, with bowed heads. Cf. *Aylmer's Field*, 625, "Long o'er his bent brows linger'd Averil."

1133, 1134. **that shone Full-summer**. Another hint suggesting the season of the year. See note to l. 788, above.

1135. **Pall'd**, shrouded; Lat. *palla*, a mantle or curtain.

**samite**. See note to l. 431, above.

1136. **creature**, servant, dependant; now generally used in the disparaging sense of 'tool,' 'minion.'

1138. **Winking his eyes**, etc., with his face twitching and contorted with sorrow.

1140. **decks**. The plural recalls the Lat. *transtra*, the movable cross planks that formed the deck in primitive boats: cf. modern 'hatches.'

1141. **a lily**, an emblem of purity, and also appropriate to the "lily maid." In pictures of the Annunciation the Virgin Mary generally carries a lily. In *Balin and Balan*, 255-261, Lancelot describes such a picture, and talks of lilies as "perfect-pure."

1145. **parted**, departed, went their way; see note l. 714.

**all in tears**, giving free course to their tears.

1170. *oriel*, a projecting window; from Low Lat. *oriolum*, for *aureolum* (*aurum*, gold), a recess or small inner chamber, such recesses being often ornamented with gilding.

summer side, southern side.

1174. **what I had not**, etc., which I should never have won but that I wished to present them to you.

1177. **to which the swan's**, etc., compared with which the white neck of a swan shows dark, darker even than the dusky down of the swan's young cygnet shows against the white of the swan.

1178. **these are words**, etc., but all words that I can use fail to describe your beauty, and I am wrong in trying to paint it in speech.

1180. **yet O grant**, etc., although words are but so imperfect an expression of my admiration, yet let me utter them just as we allow grief to utter itself in inarticulate tears.

1181. **Such sin**, etc., the fault of coming so far short of the reality, of being so feeble an expression of our actual feelings.

1183. **rumours**, viz., that Lancelot loved the maid of Astolat, and had given up his worship of the queen : see ll. 717-739.

1184. **as not**, etc., since our bond is not as indissoluble as the bond between those who are married, we should make up for the absence of a legal union by a closer union of affection and confidence in each other's faithfulness.

1187, 1188. **as I trust That you trust**, etc. Here again are two examples of Tennyson's word-play : see l. 163, above. The meaning is, 'I can hardly believe that you believe these rumours of my unfaithfulness to you, since I trust that your own nobility of spirit would disdain to think so unworthily of me.'

1190. **half turn'd away**. This refers to the queen, who, by receiving him thus coldly, showed her displeasure.

1191. **Brake**, etc. The queen's action is characteristic of strong nervous excitement kept under control. Her mind was in a tempest of passion, which must needs find an outlet in action of some sort.

1195. **Received at once**, etc., i.e. made only a single movement of her hand in taking and putting down the gems.

1200. **This good**, etc., although there may be evil in a connexion like ours, it has this much good in it that it can be more easily dissolved than the marriage bond.

1203. **To one**, etc. So also in *Guinevere*, near the end of the Idyll, the queen recognises the higher nobility of Arthur's character :—

“ Ah great and gentle lord,  
now I see thee what thou art,  
Thou art the highest and most human too.”

1206. **lost your own**, i.e. lost your own worth by your disloyalty to me.

1207. *To loyal hearts, etc.* All true hearts would value a gift not by its intrinsic worth but according to the worth of the giver.

1209. *your new fancy.* The queen hints that Lancelot's devotion to his new mistress springs from mere caprice, and is not based on solid heartfelt affection.

1210. *have your joys apart,* let not me be a witness of the delight which you and your new lady-love will take in each other.

1212. *graceful, courteous.*

*and myself, etc.* I too on my part am bound by the laws of courtesy not to say out how mean I think your conduct has been.

1215. *An end to this!* But let me put an end to this meeting and to our connexion.

1216. *A strange one, etc.* To part thus in anger is an unlooked-for ending to our friendship: nevertheless I accept it without demur. 'Amen' = 'be it so,' is generally used at the end of a prayer to indicate ratification.

1217. *her pearls.* The queen had heard of the "red sleeve Broider'd with pearls," Elaine's favour, which Lancelot had worn on his helmet.

1218. *shines me down, outshines me.*

1219. *An armlet, etc.* The queen echoes Lancelot's passionate praise of her own beauty (ll. 1176, etc., above), hinting that he will be quite ready to use similar fine compliments in her dispraise when comparing her beauty with that of her rival, Elaine.

1221. *as a faith, etc.* The queen abruptly turns the comparison from herself in order to aim another blow at Lancelot's supposed disloyalty. His faith, she says, i.e. his loyalty to her love, while it was yet untarnished, was far above gems in value. Cf. Bible, *Proverbs*, xxxi. 10: "Who can find a virtuous woman? for her price is far above rubies."

1223. *Nay, by the mother, etc.* This sudden outburst of hot wrath is in fine dramatic contrast to the cold self-repression that has hitherto marked the queen's words.

1226. *standing wide for heat.* Another casual intimation of the season. Cf. ll. 788, 1133, 1134, above.

1228. *Then from, etc.* The drops of water splashed up by the falling gems glittered in the sunlight like diamonds.

1239. *There two, etc.* Two armed sentinels guarded the door, and these were quickly joined by a crowd of folk, open-mouthed and open-eyed with wonder, ranged one above the other on the stairs like spectators in an amphitheatre.

1250. some do hold, etc. Allusions to Arthur's mysterious birth and equally mysterious doom are found in many of the Idylls. In *The Coming of Arthur* (419-421), after different accounts of his birth, his sister Bellicent, queen of Orkney, says that Merlin

"Hath spoken also, not in jest, and sworn  
Tho' men may wound him, that he will not die,  
But pass to come again."

In *Gareth and Lynette*, 199, 200, there are rumours

"that this King is not the King  
But only changeling out of Fairyland";

and again we have the Prophet's saying,

"He passes to the Isle Avilion,  
He passes and is heal'd and cannot die."

In *Guinevere*, 572. Arthur, in his parting words to the queen, says that he is going to meet

"Death, or I know not what mysterious doom,"

and in *The Passing of Arthur*, 28, he strongly asserts his faith:—

"Nay—God my Christ—I pass but shall not die."

The belief in a "second coming" is found in many of the legends of ancient heroes, e.g. in those of Nero, Charlemagne, Barbarossa, Desmond, Sebastian of Brazil. Malory, xxi. 7, writes: "Yet some men say in many parts of England that King Arthur is not dead, but had by the will of our Lord Jesu in another place. And men say that he will come again, and he shall win the holy cross. I will not say it shall be so, but rather I will say, here in this world he changed his life. But many men say that there is written upon his tomb this verse, 'Hic jacet Arthurus Rex quondam Rexque futurus.'" *The Passing of Arthur* (ll. 360-440) describes the king's disappearance: he is taken from his sole surviving follower's sight in a mysterious barge under the charge of three queens, and passes

"To the island-valley of Avilion;  
Where I will heal me of my grievous wound."

1254. From the half-face, etc., i.e. he turned his head and looked straight at them.

1256. the meek Sir Percivale. In the next Idyll, *The Holy Grail*, 3, Percivale is the knight

"Whom Arthur and his Knighthood call'd The Pure,"

and in the previous, *Merlin and Vivien*, Vivien's description of him as

"The saintly youth, the spotless lamb of Christ,"

although sarcastic, sufficiently indicates his real character. Percival is the first of all the Round Table to hear the story of



the Grail, and is the first to swear, after its veiled appearance to the assembled knights at Camelot, to follow in quest of it. Percival's achievement of the quest is only partial, his vision of it is but momentary, and he subsequently

"pass'd into the silent life of prayer,  
Praise, fast, and alms; and leaving for the cowl  
The helmet in an abbey far away  
From Camelot, there, and not long after died."

1257. **pure Sir Galahad.** Galahad, the "maiden knight," is depicted in Tennyson's early lyric, *Sir Galahad*, as the type of stainless, saint-like purity. Various stories were told of his birth:—

"some  
Call'd him a son of Lancelot, and some said  
Begotten by enchantment" (*The Holy Grail*, 143-145).

He was always clad in white armour. He was the only one of the knights who saw the Grail at its first appearance at Camelot, and the only one who fully achieved the quest; and the holy vision dwelt with him day and night in its full unveiled glory until he passed to the "spiritual city." Malory, xi. 3, says "he was named Galahad, because Sir Launcelot was so named at the fountain stone, and after that, the Lady of the Lake confirmed him Sir Launcelot du Lake."

1260. **mus'd at her.** The unusual use of the preposition 'at' (instead of 'upon' or 'over') marks that she is dead, an object for gazing at or wondering at; it may also be partially due to the desire to make the phrase a kind of echo of the 'wonder'd at her' of the previous line.

1265. **sometime, once, formerly.**

1271. **make moan.** Cf. Malory, xviii. 20: "therefore unto all ladies I make my moone."

1273, 1274. **Pray... peerless.** Cf. Malory, xviii. 20: "Pray for my soule, Sir Launcelot, as thou art a knight pearless."

1280. **freely, without reserve.**

1286. **makes not, does not ensure.**

1287. **however it hold, however true** the saying that 'to be loved makes to love again' holds in youth.

1297. **put my wits, etc.,** devised some kind of plan or other to help her to conquer her own weakness.

1299. **Sea was her wrath, etc.,** her storm of passionate anger was over, but her heart was not yet calm. A sea is often rough long after the wind has dropped.

1307. **the flash of youth,** the fierce but momentary passion of romantic youth, contrasted with the more sober, steady love of riper years.

1313. joyance, a word used by Spenser and Byron.

1316. to thy worship, to thine honour.

1318. worshipfully, 'honourably'—an echo of the 'worship' in l. 1316. Cf. the title, 'your worship,' still applied to magistrates on the bench, and 'worshipful,' applied to mayors. Malory's words (xviii. 20) are: "It will be your worship that ye oversee that she be buried worshipfully."

1319. that shrine, etc., Westminster Abbey. Malory (xviii. 20) says: "And so when she was dead, the corpse and the bed all was led the next way unto Thames, and there a man and the corpse and all were put into Thames, and so the man steered the barget unto Westminster."

1324. obsequies. "Thus our 'obsequies' is the Latin 'exequiae,' but formed under a certain impulse of 'obsequium,' and seeking to express and include the observant honour which in 'obsequium' is implied" (Trench, *On the Study of Words*).

1327. half-forgotten kings. Westminster Abbey is on the site of a Christian temple built by Sebert, king of the West Saxons, at the beginning of the seventh century. Some authorities mention a more ancient church built there by King Lucius about A.D. 184. Sebert's building gave place to that of Edward the Confessor, which in its turn was pulled down and rebuilt in a different style by Henry III. The 'half-forgotten' kings of the ages previous to Arthur's era were of course long anterior to those whose tombs are now found in the Abbey, in the Chapel of the Kings, e.g. Edward, Henry III., Edward I., etc.

1337. Disorderly, i.e. not in the processional order in which they had followed the bier, but each making his own way homeward.

1340. mine was jealousy, etc., my jealousy sprang from my great love.

1341. with his eyes, etc. Lancelot is too deeply moved to be able to return the queen's glance of contrite love.

1346. affiance, confidence, trust; used in this sense by Shakspeare and in the English Prayer-Book; its more usual meaning is betrothal or marriage. Malory (xxi. 2) has, "In Sir Launcelot and you (Sir Gawain) I most had my joy and mine affiance."

1354. homeless trouble, etc., look of sad loneliness. Cf. *The Princess*, vi. 83, "glaring with his whelpless eye."

1365. to want an eye, to be blind, incapable of seeing beauty.

1367. Yea, to be loved, etc., yes, she was fit to be loved also, if mere worth could always ensure the winning of love.

1368. him, love.

1369. **Free love, so bound, etc.** Love is free when bound only by those ties which it must naturally and willingly take upon itself, ties which bind it to what is best and noblest; it is only when fettered by such shackles of unholy desire as straitened Lancelot, that love can be truly said to be in bondage. See ll. 871, 872, above. So in the Prayer-Book the 'service' of God is said to be 'perfect freedom.'

were freest, would be freest. '

1370. **free love is for the best.** Love, if left free from ignoble promptings of our lower nature, must naturally choose what is best. Cf. *Guinevere*, 654 :—

"We needs must love the highest when we see it."

1371. **after heaven**, next to our hopes of heaven, *i.e.* of all earthly things.

1376. **answer'd nothing.** Lancelot could not give the king the confidence which he seemed to invite, nor tell him of the 'faith unfaithful' that bound him to the queen.

1381. **a blot upon the stream.** So the barge that bears Arthur away from the longing gaze of his sole remaining follower (*The Passing of Arthur*, 439),

"Look'd one black dot against the verge of dawn."

1385. **Farewell too—now at last**, *i.e.* although I bade no farewell to you at our former parting, I will do so now that we are parting for ever.

1388. **if I grant**, if I be willing to pardon.

as of love, on the ground that it proceeds from love.

1389. **crescent, growing.**

1391. **dwell on my name.** See l. 1362, above.

1393-1400. **Lancelot, whom ... dusky mere.** Malory introduces Lancelot into Arthur's court abruptly, as a full-grown knight, and makes no mention of his birth and parentage, beyond stating that he was the son of King Bans of Benwicke and Elayne his wife; he thus ignores the account of Lancelot's capture while an infant by the Lady of the Lake. He does, however, mention that his name was originally Galahad, and that the Lady of the Lake "confirmed" him as "Launcelot du Lak." One of the earliest accounts of Lancelot is to be found in a German poem, translated in the twelfth century from a French original, since lost. In the poem we are told that Lancelot's father, King Pant of Genevis and Clarine his mother were besieged in their castle by rebellious subjects: the father was mortally wounded, and, just previous to the capture of the Queen, a fairy rose in a cloud of mist and carried away the infant Lancelot from where he had been left under a tree. She took him to her own land, an isle surrounded by impassable walls in the middle of the

sea, whence the fairy derived her name of *la Dame du Lac* or the Lady of the Lake, and her foster son that of Lancelot du Lac, while her kingdom was called *Meide lant*, or the Land of Maidens. The object of the Lady of the Lake in appropriating Lancelot is to bring him up to be the deliverer of a son of hers named Mabus, who was oppressed by a giant called Iwert of Dodone. When grown up Lancelot kills the giant, receives rich presents from the Lady of the Lake, learns from her the story of his kingly origin, and becomes one of Arthur's knights.

1393. **the Lady of the Lake.** Malory gives four widely different views of the figure of the Lady of the Lake. One Lady of the Lake sends Arthur the sword Excalibur, and asks for Balin's head in return for it (Malory, ii. 3); another Lady of the Lake confines Merlin in a stone prison (*ib.* iv. 5); a third, "one of the damosels of the lake that hight Nymue (or 'Nimue') on whom Merlin "fell in a dotage," shuts the magician "in a roche ... which went under a great stone" (*ib.* iv. 1), and busies herself about Arthur's safety, "for ever she did great goodnesse unto King Arthur and to all his knights, through her sorcery and enchantments" (*ib.* xviii. 8); a fourth helps Lancelot (*ib.* xix. 11). "They may all," says Rhys (*Studies in Arthurian Legend*, c. xv.), "be taken as different aspects of the one mythic figure, the lake Lady Morgan." The old French romances give to the Lady of the Lake the name of Viviana, Viviane, and Vivienne. Tennyson has finally chosen this form for the name of Merlin's false love in his *Idyll*, *Merlin and Vivien*, although in his *Enid and Nimue*, or *The True and the False* (the original form in which the earliest *Idylls* appeared in 1857), he had chosen the name found in Malory. Vivien is in the *Idylls* quite a distinct personage from the Lady of the Lake, to whom the poet gives a spiritual and mysterious character. She has little or nothing to do with the action of the poem, and is introduced in the background for symbolic effect. We first read of her in *The Coming of Arthur*, 282-293, where at the king's coronation she stands near to the sage Merlin:—

"And near him stood the Lady of the Lake  
Who knows a subtler magic than his own—  
Clothed in white samite, mystic, wonderful.  
She gave the King his huge cross-hilted sword,  
Whereby to drive the heathen out: a mist  
Of incense curl'd about her, and her face  
Wellnigh was hidden in the minster gloom;  
But there was heard among the holy hymns  
A voice as of the waters, for she dwells  
Down in a deep; calm, whatsoever storms  
May shake the world, and when the surface rolls,  
Hath power to walk the waters like our Lord.

Again in *Gareth and Lynette*, 209-216, the passage quoted in note to l. 796, above, her statue is described as bearing several Christian symbols. She is meant to typify Religion, or "the spiritual principle that lies at the heart of all that is" (Maccallum: *Tennyson's Idylls and Arthurian Story*).

1394. Caught from his mother's arms. The original reading was—

"Lancelot, whom the Lady of the Lake  
Stole from his mother—as the story runs—  
She chanted snatches of mysterious song,  
Heard," etc.

The alteration was probably made to suit the more spiritual character with which the Lady of the Lake is invested in the later-written *Idylls*.

1399. As a king's son. Malory frequently mentions Lancelot's royal lineage: e.g. vi. 8, "I will that thou wit and know that I am Launcelot du Lake, King Ban's son of Benwicke, and very Knight of the Table Round."

1409. after Arthur's heart. So David, Bible, *Acts*, xiii. 22, is called by God a "man after mine own heart."

1410. not without, etc., i.e. I cannot break them unless Guinevere wishes it.

1415. that forgotten mere. He has implied above in l. 1410, "where'er it be," that the place of the mysterious lake from which he gets his name is no longer known. <sup>1410/</sup>

1418. Not knowing, etc. In the concluding chapters of his *Morte d'Arthur*, Malory tells how Guinevere became a nun, and Lancelot devoted himself to a life of penance and prayer in a hermitage: "And then he kneeled down on his knees and prayed the bishop for to shrive him and assoille him; and then he besought the bishop that he might be his brother. Then the bishop said 'I will gladly.' And then he put an habit upon Sir Launcelot and there he served God day and night with prayers and fastings."

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